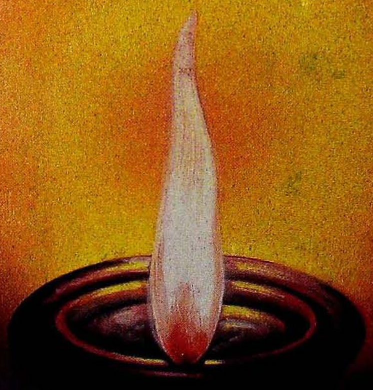
THE UNIVERSAL VISION OF SAINT RAMALINGA

(VALLALAR KANDA ORUMAIPPADU)

BY DR. MA. PO. SIVAGNANAM

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

BY DR. R. GANAPATHY



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AMALAI UNIVERSITY PUBLICATIONS

FOREWORD

By

Dr. M.A.M. RAMASWAMY

Pro Chancellor

Annamalai University

A little over a year ago, our revered scholar and parliamentarian, *Silambuchelvar* Dr. Ma. Po. Sivagnanam, expressed his keen desire that the Annamalai University undertake the translation of his well known work in Tamil, *Vallalar Kanda Orumaippadu,* into English. Though I knew that translating this *Sahithya Akademy Award* winning work into English was a stupendous task, I was eager to see to its translation, as a publication of the Annamalai University. As a centre of Tamil learning, the University has always been interested in introducing to the literary world both ancient and modern Tamil works in scholarly and easily reachable, inexpensive editions.

The classic *Thiruarutpa* itself, with the commentaries and gloss of Avvai Duraiswamy Pillai had been published in seven volumes, to begin with, by the University, and the other volumes are to be published shortly. I therefore felt that a work in English, on Saint Ramalinga, was well called for, not only as a sister volume to go with the monumental volumes of the *Arutpa,* already published, but also as an incitement to further research on the great philosophy of the 19th century savant and saint.

When I consulted Dr. S.V. Chittibabu, the Vice Chancellor then, he seized upon the idea with alacrity and did not take long to find a competent translator in Dr. R. Ganapathy, Professor of English, and to get the Syndicate commission him to do the translation. And when Prof. Rm. Sethunarayanan succeeded Prof. Chittibabu as Vice Chancellor, he took keen interest in the early publication of the work.

The relevance of Saint Ramalinga today need not be over-emphasized. At a time when the world is too much with us, it is of profit

to us to remind ourselves of our prestigious spiritual past and ancestry. to cherish the great utterances of Saint Ramalinga, based on Universal Love and Compassion for all Living Beings.

I fervently hope that this work in translation will be well-received by the English speaking world, and it will induce further fruitful inquiry into the life and philosophy of Saint Ramalinga.

I congratulate everyone connected with the production of the book in English. Indeed, my father, the late Dr. Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar, would be very pleased with the release of this book.

I have great pleasure in dedicating *The Universal Vision of Saint Ramalinga* to the lovers and devotees of *Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace*.

FOREWORD

By

Prof. Rm. SETHUNARAYANAN

Vice Chancellor

Annamalai University

When I assumed office as Vice Chancellor, the first thing that the Pro Chancellor did was to speak to me about the translation into English of the distinguished scholar and speaker, *Silambuchelvar* Dr. Ma.Po. Sivagnanam's Tamil work, *Vallalar Kanda Orumaippadu*, and its publication by the University.

Earlier, as a Member of the Syndicate, I was aware that it had commissioned Dr.R. Ganapathy, Professor of English, to do the translation, as recommended by Dr. S.V. Chittibabu. By the time, I became the Vice Chancellor, the translation was already ready and awaiting publication, thanks to the initiative taken by my predecessor, Dr. S.V. Chittibabu, and the enthusiasm of the translator, Dr. R. Ganapathy.

It is a matter of gratification to me that the work is being published in translation by the University which has an unbroken tradition of publishing rare classics in Tamil. This is the first time that a Tamil work in English translation is being published by the University. As Dr. Ma.Po.Si reveals in his preface, *Vallalar Kanda Orumaippadu* had remained untranslated these twenty five years!

I read with keen interest the Tamil version of Dr. Ma.Po.Si's book and also the English translation done so excellently by Dr. Ganapathy. Indeed, this work will be a welcome addition, to a fuller knowledge of Saint Ramalinga. It also introduces the great life and utterances of Vallalar to the English speaking world for a critical evaluation in a contemporary context.

I do hope that the non-Tamil readers will be greatly benefitted by this work in translation and they will also be so encouraged as to bring about a renaissance of Saint Ramalinga's Philosophy of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood, which is called for, I believe, in the fast levelling down of moral values in our society today.

"Hail, Supreme Light Divine!
Hail, Supreme Love Divine!!"

PREFACE*

Saint Ramalinga was not only a saint of divine grace but also a reformer who wished for revolutionary changes in society. The socio-religious-economic changes that are taking place in today's world were the dream of Saint Ramalinga a century ago. The world was not aware of this truth, because a full account of his life had not been published so far.

Saint Ramalinga was even a greater reformer than his contemporaries, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dhayanandha Saraswathy, and Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. He toiled to find a world of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood, which would be free from the differences of castes and creeds, and such class distinctions as the rich and the poor, and which will show equal love to all living beings. We may say that in this regard, none comparable to him was born in India, either during his time, or after it.

The interesting history of such a revolutionary reformer had been kept in the dark in the past century. Of the songs he composed, only the devotional songs which were intrinsically connected with tradition had spread among the people. The songs of reform which he composed on the basis of the principle, "God is one, and so is mankind", as a result of his eagerness to find a "One World", had not been propagated among the people.

For the past so many years, I was pained at heart to see this situation. I desired inwardly that the reformistic ideas of Saint Ramalinga should be propagated in the country, on the basis of piety and patriotism. I also thought of creating a milieu for the birth of a reformistic movement for freeing society from communal and religious fanaticism, transcending hatred towards castes, religion and God. As a first step towards this, I decided to write a monograph, examining the reformistic ideas in his songs and comparing them with the events of his life.

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* This is a condensed translation of the preface to the Tamil work.

Though this decision was taken ten years ago, the situation was not conducive to executing it in action. However, whenever an opportunity came, I continued to read deeply and I examined the songs of Saint Ramalinga, and jotted down notes after getting myself clarified. I also engaged myself in an attempt to gather notes on his life.

Some details about our Saint's life are furnished in the *Great Book of the Songs of Divine Grace* (*Thiruarutpa Perunool*), brought out by the Members of the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path, in Madras. Those details are not sufficient. However, I congratulate the Members of the Righteous Path for their collection of atleast those details and placing them before the people.

Whenever an opportunity occurred for me to meet admirers devoted to Saint Ramalinga, I endeavoured to gather information about him. A few of them told me that they had plenty of documents about him and that they would offer them to me. My joy knew no bounds on hearing this. But they endlessly prolonged the time, and never offered me anything. I understood that they had no such thing to give me.

I largely desired to seek information on a particular event in Saint Ramalinga's life—on the debate between the adherents to and opponents of *Arutpa*, (*The Songs of Divine Grace*).

Not even a single detail on the debate between the adherents to and opponents of *Arutpa* is found in the brief biography of the Saint's life, published by the Members of the Righteous Path. Perhaps, the Members thought it fit that references to this undesirable event, which brought no credit to the Tamil Race, should be avoided in the biography. But, for reviewing the Saint from a research point of view, I required these details.

It appears to me that the debate was an event that only contributed to the glory of Saint Ramalinga. It is not possible to suppress this event which gave rise to the polemics between the adherents and the opponents, unless I desire to totally stifle the reformistic ideas of Saint Ramalinga. Besides, the opposition to *Arutpa*, had disappeared. All the successors to this camp of opponents have now become devotees of the *Arutpa*. Therefore, the debate is useful to us only as an

event in history, I have also used it accordingly. I have devoted not a line more than necessary to it in this work.

According to a printed announcement of the opponents of *Arutpa* which was made available to me, I come to know that eighteen publications had been brought out on their behalf. Of these, only four reached my hands. I have to gratefully acknowledge that I received these works from the great Saivite savant, Thiru Sachithanandham Pillai.

I was able to get only one book, by Banukavi, among the publications brought out on behalf of the adherents to the *Arutpa.*

Thiru. A. Balakrishna Pillai, former Commissioner of the Department of Religious Endowments, Government of Tamil Nadu, had published an emended version of the Songs of Saint Ramalinga. Along with the collection of those songs, he had also published twelve volumes in all of the Saint's letters, critical essays, sermons, etc.

I have written this book, with the help of these available works, and delving deep into the *Songs of Divine Grace* and comparing the rare thoughts obtained from them with the events of his life.

I would have been happier if a more competent and appropriate person than me, had already engaged himself in this task. As such an event had not taken place, I have, with my limited knowledge, boldly taken upon myself the task which none had undertaken in the past ninety years.

I myself do not think that my work is complete. But it is my belief that it would serve as a basis for the publication atleast in future of such a book. My public life is such that in an atmosphere of hurry I had to be continuously writing to complete a book of more than five hundred pages. To facilitate my task, I began to write essays serially in the weekly, *The Sceptre*, (*Sengole*), for which I was the editor. The serial essays, begun on 23-12-1962, were concluded on 1-9-1963.

When I wrote these serial essays, I was steeped in boundless joy. Though God had involved me in a number of sacred tasks in my life, I began to experience a joy that I had not experienced before, especially during the writing of these essays. The pleasure that I derive in

offering this book is comparable to that which one experiences in finding a treasure and giving it away to all the people.

There are differences of opinion among scholars about the reformistic ideas of Saint Ramalinga and about his disappearance. I have attempted in this book to remove such differences of opinion that are not fair. Whether my endeavour in this direction succeeds or no, it is a fact that I have dispassionately attempted to do it.

Keeping Indian national unity as the foundation, and raising on it the edifice of the social unity of man, Saint Ramalinga had flown aloft the flag of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path, symbolizing Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood underlying the unity of all living kind.

As Saint Ramalinga emphasizes three kinds of unity thus, I have named this work, *The Universal Vision of Saint Ramalinga.*

I had the privilege in my childhood days of learning the divine songs of Saint Ramalinga from my mother. Therefore, I dedicate this book to her.

Madras
1—11—1963

M.P. Sivagnanam

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

My book in Tamil, *Vallalar Kanda Orumaippadu*, (*The Universal Vision of Saint Ramalinga*), was first published on Nov. 10, 1963. Since then many editions had come out.

Scholars and leaders like Rajaji, Thirumuruga Kribanandha Variar, Dr. M. Varadharajan and Dr. T. P. Meenakshisundaram, participating in functions organized for the release of these editions, declared in appreciation that I had made a soundly researched presentation of the life of Saint Ramalinga.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, when he was the President of India, selected this book, on behalf of the *Sahithya Akademy*, for the 1966 Award, and gave away the prize himself. The great philosopher paid tributes to me, stating that he had read the book in full, and that it was a well-researched monograph.

Various organizations in Tamil Nadu, including the Saint Ramalinga Society, with Thiru. N. Mahalingam as its President, and the Tamil Writers Association, got up functions in my honour.

Even after all these, my wish that the book should be brought out in English, remained unfulfilled these twenty five years! Despite my coming forward to request educational establishments and spiritual organizations, which should have brought this out into English, my desire did not fructify. But the Annamalai University came forward to execute my desire, and it has also completed the task.

Now that *Vallalar Kanda Orumaippadu*, a work of research, has come out in English, the fame of Saint Ramalinga will spread the world over.

Dr. M.A.M. Ramaswamy, Pro-Chancellor, Annamalai University, assured me that he would uudertake the task of seeing to a translation in English. Probably he thought that this would please the soul of his father, Dr. Raja Sir. M.A. Muthiah Chettiar.

Dr. S.V. Chittibabu, the Vice Chancellor at that time, entrusted the task of translating the work into English to Dr. R. Ganapathy, Professor of English at the University, and Dr. Ganapathy also completed the translation with keen enthusiasm.

By introducing me to the English speaking world, through this translation, the Annamalai University, which did me the honour of conferring upon me a Doctorate Degree, has justified that I am competent to receive the Degree. I express my gratitude to the Annamalai University for this.

The present Vice Chancellor, Prof. Rm. Sethunarayanan, was very keenly interested in completing the task of publishing my book.

I acknowledge my grateful thanks individually to the Pro-Chancellor, Dr. M.A.M. Ramaswamy, the former Vice Chancellor, Dr. S. V. Chittibabu, the present Vice Chancellor, Prof. Rm. Sethunarayanan, and to Dr. R. Ganapathy, Professor of English, for giving me the gratification of seeing an English translation of my work in my own life-time.

Madras

21—6—'87 *M.P. Sivagnanam*

AN APPRECIATION

By

Prof. S.V. CHITTIBABU

Former Vice Chancellor

Annamalai University

It gives me great pleasure to write a note of appreciation on this book, *The Universal Vision of Saint Ramalinga* which is the English translation of "வள்ளலார் கண்ட ஒருமைப்பாடு", one of the celebrated works of Dr. M. P. Sivagnanam, most endearingly called *Silambuchelvar* Dr. Ma. Po. Si. by the Tamil folks. My pleasure is all the greater because this English version is being brought out by the Annamalai University as a publication of its own. It was a year ago when I happened to be the then Vice Chancellor of the University that Dr. M.A.M. Ramaswamy, Pro Chancellor and I secured Dr. Ma. Po. Si's approval for the University to undertake the work of translating his above book into English and publishing the English version so that the English speaking world too may greatly benefit by the philosophy and teachings of Saint Ramalinga, as interpreted by Dr. Ma.Po.Si, with imaginative insight, refined sensitivity and illuminating expertise. As expected, the Syndicate heartily welcomed this move and promptly authorised me to take such steps as would be necessary to get the task accomplished in time to enable the University to release the English translation on the occasion of Dr. Ma.Po.Si's 82nd Birthday Celebrations in June 1987. Accordingly I entrusted the main work of translation to Dr. R. Ganapathy, Professor of English in the Directorate of Distance Education, Annamalai University, and set up a Committee headed by me to meet periodically and extend such help, guidance and advice as might be needed by the translator. After I laid down my office, my able successor, Prof. Rm. Sethunarayanan saw to it that the work was expedited. And he and I, along with the Pro Chancellor, are proud that the venture has been successfully completed and the book is due to be released now.

The original text in Tamil is an outstanding contribution by Dr. Ma.Po.Si. who holds a most distinguished position in a line of

notable scholars who have interpreted the culture and philosophy of India, not only to their own people but also to scholars in other parts of the world. This calls for a rare combination of gifts and attainments, which include close scholarly familiarity with philosophical and other writings of India, as well as a critical detachment in the presentation of ideas. All these things Dr. Ma.Po.Si has attained in a high degree as is evident from this book as well as other works of his. He has convincingly essayed to present the profile of Saint Ramalinga as the one sage-poet who was at once a revolutionary thinker and social reformer taking up his cudgels against a society bedevilled by obscurantism, casteism, communalism, superstitiousness, inequity and rank materialism. What is more, he has, pointed out how the philosopher-singer has proclaimed the message of the unity of human race and attainability of freedom from all fears through a state of supreme happiness and complete surrender to God. The immortal philosopher Ramalinga was one who emancipated poetry from the hold of highbrows, and with his simple and elegant diction wove a rich tapestry of profound philosophy comprehensible even to the common people. His concept of spirituality, and equality embraces all the animate and the inanimate. He gave vent to his vehement criticism of meaningless rituals and outward devotion to forms. His poems breathe equality between men and women and espouse the cause of the forlorn and the downtrodden. Above all, his clarion call to the people to pursue the path of universal love and compassion, the "pure, spiritual path of universal harmony" (*Suddha Samarasa Sanmargam*), is a message, says Dr. Ma.Po.Si rightly, that has unquestionable relevance to the present day when we see the world caught up in a tangled web of hatred, suspicion, fear, mistrust, chicanery and intrigue. I dare say that if only this book were to be in the hands of those who are holding the political destiny of mankind in their hands, their eyes would open their minds, and hearts would get cleansed and they would see that the one and only path leading to the true moral and spiritual happiness of the world is the *Suddha Samarasa Sanmargam* emblazed by the teachings and philosophy of Saint Ramalinga.

Dr. R. Ganapathy, the translator, deserves our warmest congratulations and commendation for doing an excellent job in as much as his translation of the original text into English is lucid, faithful and effective. He has been very careful in choosing appropriate phrases

and has obviously strained every nerve to put himself in harmony with the spirit that had vigorously motivated the author of the original text. He has revealed his fine grasp of the genius of Saint Ramalinga by translating even the poems into beautiful English verses which bring out the spirit and flow of the Saint's esoteric ideas, with remarkable clarity.

The printing and the format of this book deserve hearty appreciation.

In sum, this English translation of Dr. Ma.Po.Si's "வள்ளலார் கண்ட ஒருமைப்பாடு" is bound to bring a great flood of many-sided enlightenment and delight to thousands of English-knowing people. And I warmly congratulate the Annamalai University on the fascinating success of its praiseworthy venture.

FROM THE TRANSLATOR

I look upon my translation of *Vallalar Kanda Orumaippadu: The Universal Vision of Saint Ramalinga*, a *Sahithya Akademy Award* winning monograph, written by the distinguished octogenarian scholar and speaker, *Silambuchelvar* Dr. M.P. Sivagnanam, as an exciting opportunity for introducing Saint Ramalinga to the English speaking world.

On reading a number of books in English and Tamil, on the Saint and his philosophy, before my launching on this venture, I became aware that Saint Ramalinga is one of the greatest mystics mankind has ever known; he is one of the finest poets of the Tamil language; he has not been adequately translated in other languages; and that the existing translations of his works have not found exact equivalents for certain philosophic concepts and terms of the Saint, which have mostly been transliterated.

Vallalar Kanda Orumaippadu is a definitive biography of Saint Ramalinga, and an introduction to his philosophy, in Tamil. By far, the most satisfactory presentation in English is a dimunitive biography of the Saint and a brief introduction to his philosophy by *Yogi* Suddhanandha Bharati. Between Dr. M.P. Sivagnanam's and *Yogi* Suddhanandha Bharati's there are a few extended treatises and works in English and Tamil, for esoteric readers.

While the Western World still awaits a definitive edition of Saint Ramalinga's works, in English and other European languages, we in India are still to wake up to the extraordinary lyrical beauty and simplicity of Vallalar's verses. The Muse, indeed, made him "lisp in numbers", even before he was aware of them. Saint Ramalinga deserves to be read, re-read, revived and revalued as the greatest of Tamil poets. His poetic structure and texture, his imagery and symbolism, and his extreme musical felicity are a veritable store-house for many a doctoral engagement!

While Tagore's *Gitanjali*, in translation, earned him a Nobel Prize and world acclaim, a similar sublime work, The *Thiruarutpa*,

(*The Songs of Divine Grace*), of Saint Ramalinga, is yet to be known to the world, and it almost languishes in oblivion, as it has not been fully translated.

In the face of global conflicts and tensions today, and a threatened extinction of the human race by a nuclear holocaust, in our sadly divided life of isms and schisms, in our walled existence of narrow political and linguistic considerations, in our blinkered view, further befuddled by propaganda and counter-propaganda, in our commercial culture and mercenary expectations, Saint Ramalinga's edifying Gospel of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood and his moving Message of Compassion for All Living Beings should assume a profounder relevance and significance now more than ever before, and it should be the watch-word to beckon us all towards a new society of hope and happiness.

The Tamil work, *Vallalar Kanda Orumaippadu*, presents Saint Ramalinga as a socio-religious reformer and revolutionary, as mystic, philosopher, prophet, poet, preacher, seer, savant, humanitarian and a compassionate lover of all living beings.

I have tried to faithfully and closely adhere to the text, tone, style and intentions of the author, and endeavoured as far as possible to render the verse-quotations in verse-form in English. I have also attempted to find closest equivalents in English for the many tenets, codes, principles, precepts and premises, enunciated by Saint Ramalinga. I earnestly hope that this translation will serve to interest non-Tamil readers in a study of the Saint's ideas and ideals.

I am conscious of the great privilege that Dr. M.A.M. Ramaswamy, Pro Chancellor, Annamalai University, and Dr. S.V. Chittibabu, erstwhile Vice Chancellor, have given me in their choosing me to translate this work. I am grateful to them for the honour done, and to the Syndicate for commissioning me to do the translation.

My thanks are also due to Prof. Rm. Sethunarayanan, the present Vice Chancellor, for his keen interest in getting the translation published.

I had the benefit of extended discussions with the author, Dr. M.P. Sivagnanam, who clarified and enlightened me in my understanding of certain passages. I was amazed by his phenomenal memory

for he could recall page after page, *verbatim*, from the book, though he wrote it years ago! His scholarship, as always, was astounding, I thank him for the readiness with which he exposed me to Ramalinga's philosophy, and for his personal kindness and hospitality.

I must place on record my keenest appreciations of the Translation Committee, consisting of Dr. S.V. Chittibabu first, and Prof. Rm. Sethunarayanan later, as Chairman, and Dr. S.V. Shunmugam, Director, Centre of Advanced Study in Linguistics, and Mr. S. Vaithilingam, Reader in Tamil, as Members, for their constructive suggestions and comments, during our discussions. It was a real pleasure working with them, for they kept my morale high, by encouraging me always.

Mr. R. Rajamanickam, Registrar, Annamalai University, and Mr. V. Namasivayam, University Lecturer in Commerce, both devoted to the philosophy of Saint Ramalinga, made available to me, from their personal collection, almost all the books I needed to study as a preparation for my translation. I am very thankful to them for their kind and timely help.

I must acknowledge my debt to *Yogi* Suddhananda Bharati for my use of his translations of the *Thirukkural*, wherever quoted by Dr. M.P. Sivagnanam, in Tamil.

Mr. K. Balachandran, Lecturer in English, Annamalai University, deserves my special thanks for his patient proof-reading.

Annamalainagar
21.6.'87

R. Ganapathy

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1

BETWEEN 1757 AND 1857 A.D.

India proved to be a hunting-ground for foreigners from the beginning of the latter half of the 18th century to the end of the first half of the 19th century. The wandering groups of British, French, Dutch and Portuguese merchants exploited India as a market for selling their goods. These wanderers, owing to commercial rivalry and competition, not only quarrelled among themselves, but also caused dissension among the native rulers, thus making the entire country, a *Kurukshetra*—a battle-ground.

The "Auction" of the Right to Rule

Beginning from the "Battle of Plassey" in Bengal in 1757, till the "Sepoy Mutiny" which occurred in the whole of Northern India in 1857, many fierce wars of a lesser or greater degree raged through out the century. The Whites made the heads of many Indian rulers roll in these battles. The right to rule from a throne became theirs, like a mercenary commodity, and it was auctioned by them. A few of the native rulers who opposed and fought the Whites, here and there, were betrayed by the brother-powers, and ruthlessly avenged. A case to point is that of Kattabomman, the ruler of Panchalankurichi, who was betrayed by the chiefs of Pudukottai and Ettayapuram.

Though multi-nationals like the British, French, Dutch and Portuguese attempted to subjugate India, it was the British who

eventually succeeded in the competitive struggle. Except for a few pockets, the British captured the whole of India.

Like a frog, swallowed gradually by a snake, India was gobbled up little by little by the python of British power. It took a century for the East India Company to swallow it entirely. Yes. It was only after a century of battle for its freedom that India could be enslaved by the British empire. This resistence is a matter of pride for the people of India.

A 'funeral silence' pervaded the whole of India, after the failure of the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857. Only after that, Nationalism arose in India, on a constitutional basis, because of the National Congress.

Religious Feeling

If India fought for a century, it was chiefly because of the people's religious feeling, more than the political consciousness of the Indian rulers. The British were not only foreigners to India, but also alien by religion to the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Therefore, the people of India had the ability to fight for a century, more because of their pain in being enslaved by an alien religion, than for the shame of being enslaved by a foreign country. Indeed, Nationalism was then religion-oriented. Thus, the people, who were under the tyranny of the autocracy of the Indian rulers, considered the slavery to an alien religion a greater slavery, shame and injustice than the forfeiture of the right to rule.

It is because of this awareness that the majority of the people, belonging to the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religions, stood as a single force and fought. The history of the 1857 War of Indian Independence will demonstrate this.

The change that took place in the field of politics, in the century between 1757 and 1857, created a great upheaval in the realm of religion also. In those days, neither the Indian rulers, nor the people thought of religion and politics as different from each other. That is, the principle of a secularistic government was not practised. Both politics and religion were closely knit. The politics of the East India Company was not also an exception to this.

Religion and Politics

The East India Company of the English which gained political power in India used its political activity to spread Christianity in India. Why! They even planned to convert India into a Christian country.

The native rulers, before the advent of the British, cherished and fostered their respective religions. They respected other religions also. They honoured Religious Heads, listened to their counsel and ruled accordingly. Savants of religion were laureates in the court. The arrival of the East India Company changed this situation.

As the newly arrived and politically dominant East India Company was intent on the spread of Christianity, it disregarded and disrespected native religions and Religious Heads. Therefore, the growing disgust among the followers of the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religions, turned out in due course to be a fierce opposition to the Christian rule.

'The Divine Will'

The ideas expressed by some administrators of the East India Company, and by some of the Indian Fathers, increased the hatred that had grown among the Indians.

"It is God who has entrusted the vast Indian Empire to us. His command is that the Christian flag should fly from one end of India to another. Every Englishman should spend all his energy for fulfilling this. In the matter of making India a Christian land, there should not be even the slightest delay or hesitation."

This is the view that was expressed by Mangles, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the East India Company, in the British Parliament.

The following opinion was expressed by Rev. Kennedy:

"As long as our empire exists in India, we should not forget, whatever be the difficulty or misfortune that may occur, our chief duty is to spread Christianity. The Hindu-Muslim religions should be condemned, and from Kanyakumari to the Himalayan regions, throughout Hindustan, all should be made to embrace Christianity. Until

then, there should be a ceaseless activity on our part. For this we must adopt all kinds of means. We must use all the powers that we have. India should become a huge citadel of Christianity, in the entire East. Until then, there should be no let up in our efforts. If we persevere, God will certainly grant us victory in the end."

Even today, it is often said that English education has given us a lot of benefits. The architect of this education was Lord Macaulay.

When English education first began in Bengal in 1936, he said: "It is my firm conviction that if we meticulously follow our plan of education, then in 30 years, there would not be a single Hindu or Muslim in Bengal!

He said cautiously that "there would not be a Hindu or Muslim", without stating that all the Indians would be converted to Christianity through English education. Yes. He felt that English education would create people who were neither here nor there in religion. Is it not this same scene that we witness today?

Religion, a Political Means!

The English used Christianity as a means to expand the British empire. All Englishmen—the East India Company Officers with a business motive, scholars like Macaulay who 'served' the cause of education and the religious Fathers—were involved heart and soul in this 'sacred task.'

To help the Christian Fathers' propaganda compaign against the Hindu-Muslim religions, the British Company imposed a ban on Indians owning and operating a printing press. This ban was in force till the end of 1835. As the right to run a press solely vested with the English, Indians had no opportunity to work for the growth of their religion through the printing press. Utilising this opportunity, which they themselves created, the Fathers tried to convert Indians into Christians.

Fat a-Plenty!

At this juncture, to add fuel to the fire, an event occurred among the troops. Veer Savarkar describes it as follows:

"Commands were issued that Indian sepoys should compulsorily use the new cartridges, quoted with fat. Factories were opened in several places to manufacture these new cartridges in large quantities. A particular type of fat was used to make these cartridges soft and smooth. It was ordered that the fat should be removed by the teeth and not by the fingers, as was done earlier. The sepoys were also taught how to easily remove the fat by the teeth.

The quoting of the objectionable fat on the cartridges apart, the officers threatened that the sepoys who refuse to bite the cartridges, due to superstitious beliefs, would be severely punished."

This episode induced a great reaction among the Indian soldiers under the command of the East India Comany, and paved the way for a political revolution that was inter-mixed with religious sentiments. As a consequence, the outburst of the Sepoy Mutiny continued for a year from Peshawar to Calcutta, in the major regions of Northern India. Hindu-Muslim rulers, army chieftains, *maulvis*, priests and the people at large participated in it.

The Queen's Proclamation

Queen Victoria, the British Empress, becoming aware of the wounded religious feelings of the people, promulgated a proclamation, with the aim of suppressing the mutiny.

In it she guaranteed that, except for those States, captured by the East India Company, the independent status of the rest of the States would be recognised; that the British rule would not interfere with the religious affairs of Indians; and that jobs would be offered to whoever had education, merit and qualification, without communal and religious discrimination. After this proclamation, the "freedom struggle" caused by the interaction between religions and politics fizzled out.

In the century between 1757 and 1857, the people of India became the victims of the inevitability of not only losing the right to rule and but also forfeiting their religious privileges. Because of the Queen's proclamation, the administration of India changed hands from the East India Company to the British Parliament. Though the condition of the Indian people had changed in the realm of religion, in

political and economic affairs, slavery was confirmed worse than ever before.

Renaissance in Religion

Even though India was enslaved in the fields of politics and economics, an advantage did result as a blessing in disguise. Indeed, way was paved for a renaissance in the realm of religion. The Christian Fathers, dubbing the ancient beliefs and practices of the Hindu Religion as "superstitious", carried on a propaganda campaign against them. Therefore, orthodox religion that grew without opposition for a millennium and more, met with an opposition.

The preaching of the Christian Fathers gave rise to a revelation among the people who were oppressed in the name of caste and religion. Not stopping with mere religious propaganda, the Fathers approached the suppressed Hindus, showed them kindness and served them in constructive ways. They helped the down-trodden with education, sanitation, housing, etc. Therefore, a large number among the Hindus, "imprisoned" as they were in hutments and slum areas, embraced Christianity. Their number was not small. It was about ten millions.

The change that occurred in India shocked a few among the educated Hindus. It also created an awareness among them that the Hindu religion should be revived. They were aware that owing to philosophical, religious and communal differences, Indian society was disunited and fragmented.

Even during the century between 1757 and 1857, religious conversion was intensified. As a result, there was a change of heart among the educated Hindus. The common folk from the lower strata of society were not unduly perturbed by the decline of Hindu religion, because of the growth of Christianity, or by the tyranny caused by the British power, established with the help of Christianity, for they were already exploited and oppressed by those from within the country. This situation made atleast a few among the educated and the influential to think. The nascent feeling among a few of the upper and middle classes created an atmosphere for the advent of leaders who would bring about a great religious upheaval. Perhaps, it was the Will

of God that a religious upheaval should occur as a precursor to the later political revolution.

There is a long historical background to this situation. The Muslim rulers who invaded India, as well as the Muslim religion, were responsible for creating this. It is necessary that the historical background is narrated even briefly.

The Path of Ghazni

Ghazni Mohamed first invaded India from Afghanistan in the 11th century and he attacked India continuously for 17 years. Of these, his invasion of Somanathapur was a terrible blow that fell on Indian civilization. Breaking the idol of Somanath, he plundered a great lot of wealth, and returned to his country. Though the act of Ghazni Mohamed generally represented the ethos of a war culture, or unculture of the rulers belonging to different religions, the mad act of Ghazni Mohamed the Muslim, was the root-cause for a great religion-based-war in Hindu-India.

The blow that Ghazni gave to the spiritual culture of India awakened the Hindu religionists. The repeated Muslim invasions of India, from the time of Ghazni Mohamed, affected not only the Indian peoples' political rights, but also their religio-cultural prerogatives.

An Embattled Life!

During the 750 years then, from the 11th century A.D. to the middle of the 18th century, the people of Northern India fought to protect not only their right to rule, but also their cultural rights. For these unfortunate people therefore, fighting indeed was a way of life. The blood and tears shed by the people on both sides in the battle may be said to have flowed like a river ! Just as a long-standing disease in the body defeats even medical science, the war that was waged between the Hindus and Muslims for centuries, thwarted the moral codes of the religions they followed.

The Footprints, Gone!

Neither the Muslim invaders, nor their successors could trace back their ancestors' route to their native land, as it had disappeared. In fact, the war, begun by the aggressors, was continuously waged even

after their disappearance, by a long line of successors, that it's foreigness was lost, and it changed to such an extent as to be described as an "internal war". This sad circumstance was the curse that History bestowed upon India! The cure lasted till the advent of the East India Company, and it also helped these entrants to stabilize their position.

Exploiting the undesirable religious animosity between the Hindus and Muslims, the East India Company and the Christian preachers as well, endeavoured to establish Christanity and the British Empire in India. The domination of the East India Company, which began in 1757, gradually grew, strengthened and was complete as a result of Queen Victoria's proclamation in 1858.

The Tears of a Poet

Poet Bharati tearfully describes the tribulations experienced by the people when the Muslim and Christian communities militarily assailed Indian culture, one after another.

As though Mother India welcomed the Prince of Wales, when he visited India, Bharati had written of the sufferings of the people, owing to the Muslim invasion and rule, and of how these old tyrannies disappeared because of the arrival of the British, in a poem thus:

> "Hear, O, Prince! Before your ancestors began to rule my dear children, I stood in deep anguish of the heart. The sorrows that occurred during the thousand years of a heartless alien rule were countless. Some inner wounds healed, after your countrymen came. The wars ceased, and my poor children flourished in peace. Therefore, Mother India prospered with grace as of yore. Many industries of production came into being. Besides, the schemes of religious bigots disappeared. Many evils like throwing women into the river, killing children under the wheel of a chariot, and burning wives along with their dead husbands, were put an end to. But myriad ills persisted still."

The poet refers to the continued existence of many ills still, even though some of them, caused by the Muslim invasion, had been removed by the British.

The poet, while referring to the advantages that had occurred by the arrival of the British, also refers to the new ills of Hindus and Muslims, as a result of their fanatic aggrandisement thus:

In such an atmosphere, great saints who would put an end to religious fanaticism, and foster the growth of righteousness in religion were required. Righteous minded seers, capable of creating an amicable outlook among the Hindu, Muslim and Christian religions, by transporting the sorry state of their flourishing as army camps, opposed to each other, were needed.

To put it briefly, revolutionary reformers were required:

1. to protect Indian culture that was being destroyed by the onslaughts of other religions.

2. to bring about an integration among the Hindu, Muslim and Christian religions, and

3. to totally destroy:

a. the superstitions among the Hindus.
b. the caste-based superiority-inferiority complexes, and
c. the false rituals of priests.

The orthodox Brahmins who were the Hindu Religious Heads, encouraged among Hindus a militant fanaticism against alien religions. They were not inclined either to create an equality among the Hindus, or to develop an outlook of mutual harmony, or to prevent theological disputes. To put it briefly, Religious Establishments and Heads did not come forward to act, realizing the changing spirit of the time. Though the occasion compelled a renaissance in Hindu religion, there was no change of heart in these religious heads and priests. Angered by the domination of an alien religion that came from elsewhere, and the injustices it caused, both the Hindu Rulers and Religionists induced the people to fight against it. But they were not certainly prepared to give up the control over their own people, or the injustices inflicted upon them for thousands of years.

Messiahs Four!

In this milieu, India's ancient religion was subjected to such a great misfortune for which no ordinary men but a divine Messiah

alone could have found a solution. Amidst this confusion, four divine Messiahs appeared one after another in the sacred land of India, in the period between 1774 and 1836. They were respectively, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Saints Ramalinga, Dhayanandha Saraswathy, and Ramakrishna. A mother, though an embodiment of filial love, feeds only that child which cries; so does God also. That was why Saint Manickavasaga said: "Sufferer that I am, when I cry, you will come." This is the same truth that an utterance in *Gita*, by Krishna reveals: "I shall appear when justice is destroyed and people cry in agony."

A Light was Born

Saint Ramalinga, later known as "Arutprakasa Vallalar" (Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace), was born on the 5th of October, 1823. Saint Ramalinga was born on a Sunday, like the rising sun, to dispel the darkness of religious ignorance.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was born on the 22nd day of May, 1774, 49 years before the birth of Saint Ramalinga, in a place called Radha Nagar, in West Bengal. He was not only well-versed in Bengali, his mother tongue, but also proficient in Sanskrit, the language of culture. He also learnt other languages like English, Greek, Persian and Arabic. He learnt thoroughly the Hindu scriptures and became a scholar.

Vedas, Upanishads and Scriptures

He learnt the Bible in the Greek language. He went to Tibet and succeeded in his attempt to learn the Pali language in order to study Buddhist writings in Pali. As he amply possessed a sense of tolerance, required of a religious reformer, he endeavoured to grasp the truths embedded in all religious works.

Swami Dhayanandha

Swami Dhayanandha Saraswathy was born in the year 1824, at Dhungra, Gujarath, in Northwestern India, a year after the birth of Saint Ramalinga. His original name was Moolasankar. He acquired deep erudition in three languages—Gujarathi, Hindi and Sanskrit.

Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna was born in a hamlet called Kamarpur, in Bengal, 13 years after the birth of Saint Ramalinga. As the priest of a Kali temple, in Calcutta, he had the opportunity to receive divine blessings.

Even though these four great men differed among themselves in many ideas, their outlook was revolutionary in socio- religious reformation:

Eradicating descriminations of caste, making the people realise the truth that "God is one,"

Establishing an equality among the Hindus, by destroying all differences, opposing the people's implied acceptance of all that is said by the Brahmins, without their studying the scriptural, canonical and traditional Hindu religious works by themselves,

Creating equality of man and woman by abolishing the subjugation of women, and endeavouring to create an amity among all religions.

These reformistic principles were common to these four great men, mentioned above.

The Differences

Both Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Dhayanandha Saraswathy totally opposed idol worship. The principle that God is the One and the Many, He as the Concrete, Abstract, Existential and Non-existential were followed as the moral precepts by Saint Ramalinga and Ramakrishna in their lives. In one respect, Saint Ramalinga differs from Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dhayanandha and Ramakrishna. Saint Ramalinga had as his final goal the finding of a "One World", religionless, and characterized by Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood.

He preached to the peoples of the world, of a society, not conditioned by the scriptural, the canonical and the traditional, and of attaining a divine state by following a divine path. In this respect Saint Ramalinga appeared to be a more intense revolutionary than the other three.

These four greatmen detested caste discriminations. We are in agreement with that principle. However, to properly understand the ime in which they were born, we should to some extent bear in mind tthe castes they hailed from.

The Change of Leadership

All the three-Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dhayanandha, and Ramakrishna - who hailed from the North, were born in the Brahmin community. Saint Ramalinga who hailed from the South, was born in the *Karuneegar* caste, in Tamil Nadu. The Tamil Brahmin community which witnessed the advent of revolutionary reformers like Adhisankara and Ramanuja, failed to create a revolutionary social reformer from within its fold, in such a milieu as described above. The Brahmin community apart, the Vellala community which kept the Saivite religion in its hold also failed to produce a reformer.

Saint Ramalinga established an organization to spread his code of righteousness. He dreamt that with its help an absolutely new society, without caste and religious differences, and completely free from superstitions of yore, could be created.

The Storm of Revolution

About this time, both Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Dhayanandha founded separate movements for bringing about revolutionary changes amongst the Hindus. Raj Ram Mohan Roy established an organisation called "The Spiritual Society", which he later changed into "Brahma Samaj".

Dhayanandha Saraswathy founded an establishment called "Arya Samaj". Ramakrishna who was contemporaneous to these three great men did not start any separate movement for dessiminating his beliefs. But he was himself as effective as a grand movement. He had innumerable disciples to spread his thoughts. After his death his principal disciple, Narendhra, established "The Sri Ramakrishna Society". He changed his name as Vievakanandha, wore saffron robes, and became an ascetic. All the disciples of Ramakrishna assumed new names and became ascetics. "Sri Ramakrishna Mutt" was established exclusively for these monks, in Belur near Calcutta.

The Whiteman's Language and the Light of Reason!

Knowing about the work of organisations like the "Brahma Samaj", "Arya Samaj", and "The Ramakrishna Mutt", in some detail we hope, will enable us to follow "Arutjothi Vallalar", the Saint of the Light of Divine Grace fairly well.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy bestowed keen attention on socio-religious reform, with assistance from the "Brahma Samaj".

He opposed idol-worship and preached people the means of worshipping God as abstract. He fully opposed the injustice of woman being slave to man. He endeavoured to re-establish the Vedic canon that man and woman are equal. He accepted those scriptural, canonical and traditionally orthodox ideas which were forward-looking and befitting the scientific era, and waged a war of ideas against the orthodox religion, in order to eradicate those superstitious beliefs, not in tune with the time.

The civilization of Europe which inundated Asia, also influenced India. Raja Ram Mohan Roy who had learnt English, and therefore loved European Culture, considered it a reformistic service to impose a mixed culture on the people of India, without realizing the consequences. In support of that cause, he wished that all the people of India should learn English language and that all education should be inculcated in that language. He lent whole-hearted support to the educational system of Lord Macaulay, which was anti-national.

Even though Raja Ram Mohan Roy was deeply read in Sanskrit, he showed some dislike towards that language as he considered it as contributing to superstitious beliefs.

Owing this dislike particularly for Sanskrit, the leader of the "Brahma Samaj" loved the language of the Whiteman and was determined to make it the common language of India.

The New Superstition!

Raja Ram Mohan Roy firmly believed that only if knowledge of English spread, people could be released from religious superstition. We could not accept this straight away.

We should not forget that it was only in the time of Raja Ram Mohan Roy that reformers like Saint Ramalinga, Dhayanandha, and Ramakrishna were born. These three did not have any knowledge of English at all. Still, they did crusade with all their breath against the growing superstitions as a result of the scriptural, canonical and traditionally orthodox writing. In this way, Saint Ramalinga was a greater revolutionary than the other three. Therefore it was a new superstition to accept the Whiteman's language as the 'rising sun of reason' to dispel the darkness of superstitious beliefs. A century's experience of ours, after Raja Ram Mohan Roy, demonstrated that even graduates, post-graduates, and doctors and engineers who were educated in the English language were no exception to the old superstitious beliefs. We shall understand this by the words of the great poet, Bharati.

Bharathi's Prophecy!

"English education is being carried on in this land for the last one century. Thousands of schools have been established. Millions and millions of people have studied and passed out from these. Are these exempt from blind rituals? No.

The qualities of acting according to conscience, and a broad outlook, in keeping with one's education, are so much less in those who have passed out from these schools.

Has any one of these innumerable Aiyers, Aiyangars, Pillais and Mudaliars, who are Graduates and Post-Graduates, Lawyers, Teachers, Engineers, and other Office-Holders, stopped looking up the auspicious hour for the marriage at their homes?"

An Experiment!

We should consider the opinion of Raja Ram Mohan Roy that only by English education superstitions could be dispelled as an experimental attempt. Bharati's utterance on the basis of his experience demonstrated that Raja Ram Mohan Roy's experiment did not yield the results he himself expected.

Though Raja Ram Mohan Roy desired to give English the status of a common language which Sanskrit had, he did not encourage the English language at the expense of Bengali, his mother tongue.

The credit of causing the growth of the Bengali language and a literary renaissance in that language belongs solely to Raja Ram Mohan Roy.

In those days, Raja Ram Mohan Roy supported that only English should be made the language of instruction in schools. He could not have acted in any other way. Neither able teachers to teach scientific subjects in the regional languages, nor authors to write books in them, were available in the 19th century. It was possible, therefore, that Raja Ram Mohan Roy encouraged English becoming the medium of instruction, as a necessary evil. Besides, the credit of being the capital of the Indian Government in the first half of the 19th century belonged only to Calcutta. Thus Raja Ram Mohan Roy who lived in Calcutta, tried, with the rule of the Centre in mind, to seek an answer to the question as to which to accept as a common language. In the circumstances existing then, only one of the three languages - Sanskrit, Urdu, and English, had to be selected as the common language. As Sanskrit was not a spoken language, he could not have selected it, and it could not be thought that he who had caused a revival of the Hindu religion, could have accepted the Urdu language. Under these circumstances, we can understand his act of supporting English as a common language. But the condition today is different.

Struggle for Religious Transformation

Another great movement born in the time of Saint Ramalinga was the Arya Samaj. By and large, Hindu religious reformation was the aim of the Samaj. It attempted whole-heartedly to bring the Hindus who had embraced other religions like Islam and Christianity, owing to poverty, ignorance, and the tyrannies of orthodoxy, back again to the original religion, and prevented the tendency to embrace other religions. This was its intrinsic feature, then and now. It accepted ancient Vedic canons. Determined to refute old ritualistic religion, it opposed, idol-worship, like the Bramha Samaj, without fear or favour. Repudiating the tradionalists' intepretations of the Vedas, the Arya Samaj served to spread the real principles of the Vedas among the people. Thus Swami Dhayanandha wrote and published a book of Vedic expositions, called "Sathyartha Prakash". He may be said to be the enemy of orthodoxy and tradionalism.

The Ramakrishna Society which was founded a little later and the monks affiliated to it, sought a renaissance in religion, in accor-

dance with the consciousness of national freedom, born and fostered in the 19th century. They persevered to cut at the root of the tyranny of untouchability, caste discriminations and philosophic conflicts based on religion.

Thus, the three great movements in the North like a trident, not only fought against religions from without, but also against the orthodoxy of the religions from with in.

Though the Four - Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Saint Ramalinga, Swami Dhayanantha Saraswathi and Ramakrishna - were born more or less in the same period, there is no indication that there was any meeting or contact between them.

Similarly, these four movements, based on the faiths of the four, did not have any close contact or co-operation among them. However, we can see in clear historical perspective their unity of faith, and their militant feeling in fighting social evils.

It is also essential that we inspect the present condition of those four great movements, and compare and contrast one with the other to understand their successes and failures.

Our Saint among the Four

Unlike Saint Ramalinga, the three other Saints enjoyed the support of the people of North India during their life time. Though the orthodox people strongly opposed them, they were able to thrive in furtherance of their ideals.

The Brahma Samaj of Raja Ram Mohan Roy enjoyed the support of the educated, particularly the English educated in Bengal, who took pride in describing themselves as devotees of the Samaj. The tenets of the Samaj spread not only in India, but also abroad, and the number of the disciples of Raja Ram Mohan Roy increased. The Samaj was able to bring about great changes in the social, educational and religious realms. In particular, the great efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy were chiefly responsible for the enactment to end the cruelty of the wife being killed after the death of the husband. It cannot be denied that the Brahma Samaj secured a laudable place in he history of India, particularly in the 19th century, even though it

does not function as effectively today, in India as well as in the State of Bengal.

The New Caste

Similarly, the Arya Samaj, founded by Dhayanandha Saraswathy frustrated the fanatic opposition of the orthodox, and had grown strong in North India. This movement created millions of genuine and idealistic devotees of the Samaj. The Arya Samaj did not dislike the Sanskrit language. It had difference of opinion with regard to the way its literature was used. Therefore it had created a grand renaissance in the realm of Sanskrit Literature.

Caste differences, and superiority - inferiority feelings did not surface much among the followers of the Arya Samaj. Thus Dhayanandha Saraswathy - one of the great souls - created a new caste with a forward looking mentality.

Of the successes of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Dhayananda Saraswathy, Swamy Vivekananda declares with great relish in his *Contemporary India* thus:

"It is an undoubted fact that had not the Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj been founded in the present time, Muslims and Christians would have far outnumbered the Hindus of today."

The great Movement, founded by Swami Vivekananda after Ramakrishna, is very *influential*, among the people. Its branches and *mutts* exist not in India alone, but in other lands too. We also see internationally famous ascetics.

The Path of Saint Ramalinga

When Saint Ramalinga is compared to Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dhayananda and Ramakrishna, he appears to be a very great Saint, not in any way lesser than them—as a mystic renowned to have conquered death. But considering the fame that these three enjoyed in their life-time and in their own States, it can not be said that Saint Ramalinga enjoyed great influence among the people of Tamil Nadu. The movements based on the faiths of these three great men, spread throughout India during their life time, and grew even after their lives, and brought about an ethical renaissance in the life of the people of

India. It cannot be similarly said, that the Movement enunciated by Saint Ramalinga showed any appreciable progress, during his time or later, towards social, religious reform, as expected by him, or caused a renaissance in the life of the Tamils. People have not still admired the songs he had composed, especially those with reformistic ideas and content. They recite only his devotional songs. This is not a defect of Saint Ramalinga. This is the result of a deeply ingrained communal fanaticism in Tamil Nadu.

This is because, in the 19th century milieu, there existed differences between the North and the South.

The Supremacy Shaken!

The frequent military based political and religious invasions of the Muslims in the North and the religious and political invasions of the mercenary Whites later on, shook the foundation of the citadel of Hindu orthodoxy. As the generation of martial leadership was destroyed by foreigners in the war that the people of the North waged against the twin-invasions, its place was taken up by Brahmins. Therefore, a few at least among the Brahmin community were freed from the evils of orthodox feelings of apartness from the people and from a superiority complex. The majority of the other three communities had a natural mental make-up to welcome the opposition to orthodoxy.

The Milieu that helped

The caste-discriminations that permeated the canons of Hindu Religion, and the antagonistic feelings that grew amidst these differences, became generally powerless, owing to the invasions of alien religions. This opportune condition helped the formation of such organisations as the Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Samaj, and also let them flourish successfully.

Different circumstances in the Tamil Country

The situation in Tamil Nadu was entirely different from this. The orthodox Brahmins who dominated the whole of society did not reflect the change of heart of the orthodox Brahmins of the North. Brahminism here was far apart from the militant characteristics! The martial dimensions of Tamil Nadu, destroyed by the Muslims and

the English, failed to assume responsibility. Brahminism, apart from isolating others from itself, created a big cleavage between itself and them and also devoted its attention to defending itself. It considered it as its duty to protect and preserve these caste discriminations, which originated, grew and strengthened themselves in the distant past.

In those days, there were no external invasion on Tamil Nadu that could shake the foundations of the Tamil society. The victorious march of the Muslim Rulers from the North to the South was halted without further progress by the rival onslaughts of the Christian traders.

The Domination of Orthodoxy

The Christian Power that entered the South with the help of the East India Company was not a serious challenge to the orthodoxy in the land. Thus, the Hindu-Saivaite Orthodoxy, disinclined to welcome a Messiah from another caste, and without having the ability to create a reformistic minded saviour from among themselves, assumed dominance, according to their own dictates, as though the "actions of the powerful were always right."

Eternal Light

Indeed, Saint Ramalinga without wielding any unique influence over society, was born in the backward community of *Karuneegars*, unlike Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dhayanandha and Ramakrishna, ho were born into an orthodox eminency which dominated over society. Eventhough he initiated a reformistic revolution, Saint Ramalinga was not historically involved to any saga of achievement. However, the Light of Grace he enkindled is not completely put out. It is an eternal light! It is dull, without being kindled. If there is some one to kindle it, the entire world will show itself in that flame of grace.

Untouchability

As Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dhayanandha, and Ramakrishna were born in the upper caste which had religious leadership, they had the opportunity to grow out of that community owing to their birth, Saint Ramalinga had neither the right nor the opportunity. Therefore, he could not open the sanctified doors of the hearts of the orthodox,

nor could he reach them, because of the "untouchability" which existed then as it exists now:

None can deny that though Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ramakrishna were mystics who had surpassed linguistic and communal differences, the communal feelings of the Bengalis were largley responsible for their successful progress!

The Tamils, did not appropriately cherish Saint Ramalinga's revolutionary principles of reform, because of their "broad outlook" which was devoid of communal feelings. To put it briefly, their own community and kindred communal influences had helped Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dhayanandha and Ramakrishna, though they might not have liked it. For Saint Ramalinga, his own community had neither the influence nor the awareness.

With this in mind, and after a study of history of Saint Ramalinga, his service should be evaluated.

So far we examined the milieu of Saint Ramalinga's time. We shall go to him from now on.

II

YOUTH HOOD

Saint Ramalinga was earthly born like any one of us, on Sunday the 5th of October, 1823, on the 21st of *Purattasi*, in the year of *Subhanu*. That memorable day was the sacred day when the Movement for the life of righteous path originated. The great lady who was the mother of this divine radiance was called Chinnammal. The father that sired such a son who would bring him renown the world over was Ramaiah Pillai of whom the world was later to exclaim, "What penance this man would have done to beget such a son!" The birthplace of Saint Ramalinga, the favourite child of Lord Nataraja, was Maruvoor, north-west of Chidambaram.

The Youngest

Chinnammal was the sixth wife of Ramaiah Pillai. After having lost his five wives, one after another, he married Chinnammal for the sixth time. After four children - Sabapathy, Parasuraman, Sundarambal, and Unnamalai, Chinnammal gave birth to Ramalinga as the 5th and the last child.

A Description of the Birth!

The Great Book of the Songs of Divine Grace, published by the Madras Society of Pure and Righteous Path, gives the following account of the miracles which occurred during the birth of Ramalinga.

"At that time, an unprecedented halo of light appeared all over the world. The deities above were joyous. All were delighted, as they

rejoiced the day as auspicious; and they praised the birth of a great man."

Though such a description is from an orthodox imagination, the writer thinks that such miracles should have happened. His imagined description did not obtrude the history of this Saint. Professor A. Varadhananjaiah Pillai, of a later time, praises the birth of this Saint, as follows:

"Just as the North witnessed the phenomena of the renowned Saint Ramakrishna and his disciple, the great Swami Vivekananda, so also was the Tamil Land greatly blessed by the birth of Saint Ramalinga."

Both Ramakrishna and his principal disciple, Swami Vivekananda were indeed very great saints, revered by mankind. But Saint Ramalinga is a more intense and revolutionary socio-religious reformer than these two.

Messiah of the Righteous Path

At the end of Saint Ramalinga's life, the whole world became aware of him as a Divine Messiah. Of his birth, Ramalinga states in a poem, as follows:

"God ordained the advent of my birth in this epoch only to reform the people of the world who are wicked inside, but appear to be good from outside, to enable them to achieve a society of righteous path and to let them rejoice in their attainment of Divinity from within."

This utterance of Saint Ramalinga was not one due to his vanity. It is a demonstration of the truth: "My deeds are nothing by themselves". We should also remember here what Saint Manickavasaga said: "By His grace, I worship His Feet", and also, "Who would have known me, my Self, my Mind and my Perceptions, if the Lord had not overmastered me" Prophet Mohamed described himself as the "Divine Messenger". Gandhiji also considered himself as the servant sent by God. Saint Ramalinga also emphasises only this truth.

The Horoscope "Speaks"!

The parents of the Divine Messenger Ramalinga, wished to know his future. According to the time of his birth, they cast a

horoscope for him. About the future revolutionary reformer who sang of putting an end to all superstitions, an expert astrologer had the following predictions to make:

"The possessor of this horoscope is immortal. He is fearless, and will live as the world's saviour, sans death. He will not aspire for riches. He will be interested in spiritual meditation. He will have great compassion for all lives. In his tenth year, he will be keenly devoted to something and will have revelations of his powers of sacred knowledge and of reforming the world. At the age of 30, he will acquire divine consciousness. At the age of 40, he will attain a timeless dimension. At 50, through divine powers, he will scintillate with a radiant mien, and will be a great man. In a trice of thought, he will achieve scriptural, spiritual, medical, sophistic and scholarly knowledge."

What Astrology did not Predict!

As those predictions were reached at the time when Ramalinga was born, astrological science must be held in high esteem. Even then, it may be said that his future was not predicted properly.

"The astrologer had failed to prophecy that the holder of this horoscope would be an enemy of caste and creed; that he would fight cant and hypocrisy: that he would eradicate the four-fold distinctions of caste; that he would condemn those wicked men who perpetuate hatred by preaching variant Gods." Perhaps, astrology itself did not help the astrologer with such powers of presage! That was why Bharati sang:

> "I searched the scriptures, to find the trivial looming large.
> Can truths be found in the basket of falsehood of those
> fools who profess die-hard traditions?"

Divine Revelation

Ramalinga revealed his inward grace even during his childhood-days. There is an account of this in the *Great Book of the Songs of Divine Grace as follows*:

"One day Ramaiah Pillai went with his dear wife and children to Chidambaram for the worship of the Cosmic Dancer, Lord Nataraja.

He offered worship with his young son in his arms. The Brahmin priest, Appaiah Dhikshathar, was just then offering worship to the Lord, with a lighted camphor. The baby in arms devouvered with his magnetic eyes the radiant camphor light, and the divinely graceful face of the Cosmic Dancer of Chidambaram, who danced on a solitary leg to please his consort, Sivakama Valli, and laughed heartily, to the amazement of the onlookers. On seeing this, Appaiah Dhikshathar blessed the child as the Divine offspring of the Lord of Chidambaram, and hospitably received Ramaiah Pillai, his wife and children at his house", Ramaiah Pillai died early as though he was aware that his son had deemed the Lord of Chidambaram as his Father. What to make out of the vagaries of Fate that the famed father of a son who had imbibed a philosophy to conquer death should die!

The entire responsibility of taking care of a family, without a Head, fell upon the eldest son, Sabapathy, The family was very indigent. Ramaiah Pillai took care of his wife and children through the means earned by his teaching the children of the village and by writing accounts for merchants. Even that meagre income was lost when he died. Brother Sabapathy took his mother, brothers and sisters to his grandmother's residence in Ponneri. Captivated by Ramalinga's graceful countenance, the old lady brought him up very endearingly.

After a few years, Sabapathy settled in Madras, with his brothers and sisters. He learnt the sweet tongue of Tamil from the great savant, Kancheepuram Sabapathy Mudaliar, and acquired proficiency in it. Like his father, he took care of his family by means of earning through teaching the childern of his locality, and by giving religious discourses in his leisure time.

The Untaught Rebel!

Sabapathy sent his dear brother to school at the age of five, to be educated. The youngest was not inclined to learn at school. Realizing this, the elder brother took upon himself the task of educating his brother. Ramalinga, blessed with the rare gift of intuitive awareness, did not learn from his brother. Regretting this, Sabapathy Pillai sent Ramalinga to his teacher, Kancheepuram Maha Vidhvan Sabapathy Mudaliar, and encouraged him to study there. Even this attempt was infructuous.

In those days, there were schools in Madras, which taught the English language. But where was the opportunity for him who had put a stop to school education itself to learn the Whiteman's language? Saint Manickavasaga himself says: "I escaped from the vast ocean called education". Even Manickavasaga fell into this vast ocean and escaped later! Ramalinga was prevented and saved from this fall, by Providence!

The Intuitive Thinker

Though Ramalinga, unlike others, did not show interest in formal learning, particularly grammar and literature, he should have learnt to read and write in his mother tongue, Tamil. Beyond this, he had an intuitive awareness of scriptural and canonical knowledge which flourished in his time as intellectual sciences. Divine Grace had gifted him that ability.

Swami Ramakrishna Paramahamsa had done only upto the II standard of primary schooling. Beyond that he did not do any schoolling. However, he was brilliantly intuitive. Our Saint Ramalinga, apart from learning by himself Tamil Grammar and Literature at later time and teaching them, was also very proficient in Sanskrit. It is not known from where and from whom he had achieved mastery of Tamiand Sanskrit. It is said that "he became aware, without learning". It must be construed that without being taught by others, he learnt and understood by Divine Grace.

Untaught when young,
As though all was learnt before,
Attaining acute knowledge in Ancient Arts,
And in supreme scriptural works,
Oh! His facile Tamil Iyrics sing spontaneously
Of rare and fine thoughts, and flow
Like nectar gushing forth from within.

Thus sings savant A. Varadhananjaiah Pillai of the fame of Saint Ramalinga's intuitive learning and his rare capacity for inditing songs

"Oh ! Supreme Light Divine!

The Basis of my Being,

That blessed me with Enlightment,

To be aware without learning."

Saint Ramalinga himself declares humbly that he had the ability to learn by himself by Divine Grace, without being taught by others in these lines:

"Oh ! My Kindred ! Imbibe me with the Grace of Intuitive knowledge,

To let all the taught

Come to me for learning."

Not all are previleged to have the ability to known without study. Similarly, not all can understand this. But great men like Ramakrishna and Ramalinga had actually demonstrated to disbelievers that they had intuitive powers.

Those who, contrary to Indian Culture, acquired English education as enunciated by Lord Macaulay, would not be convinced that there is a faculty which enables one to know without study. It is natural that those who do not learn what is taught, who do not grasp what is learnt, and who cannot follow in life what is grasped, refuse to believe that there is intuitive knowledge. "Knowledge" does not originate on paper, to enter the head later. On the contrary, it originates in the head first and afterwards reaches books. More than those who assiduously learn and understand, it is those who know by intuition that have the capacity to approach spiritual matters. Great poet Nackeerar described the ability of those intuitive saints, in *Thirumurugatruppatai*, thus:

"These savants surpass those of sound learning, and are so great as to be the standard for the learned to measure themselves."

Ramalinga's brother did not understand his brother's inner light. He considered him an ignorant and rude fellow who is not interested in learning. He became extremely angry, refused his dear brother food and clothing, and drove him out of the house. His brother's wife, Pappathi Ammal, with a filial affection, keener than a mother's, privately fed her brother in law at regular intervals, without the knowledge of her husband.

The father's memorial day came. Friends and relatives were gathered in large number at the residence. Sabapathy Pillai suddenly thought of his dear brother, during that memorial occasion. On seeing Ramalinga who had come there to partake of his food in private, his brother's wife shed tears that even on a memorable day like this he was to eat separately. On seeing his sister-in-law's affection welling up in the form of tears, Ramalinga in remorse, promised that he would study, as advised by his brother. The brother and his wife, hoping that the boy had "reformed", vacated a room upstairs in the house they lived in, and advised him to stay there and study.

Thus, Ramalinga stayed separately in a room upstairs, and began to "learn," as advised by his brother's wife. This house was situated at No. 39, Veeraswamy Pillai Street, near Seven Wells, Madras.

III

THE VISION OF LORD MURUGA ON THE MIRROR!

What Saint Ramalinga started to learn was eternal knowledge. He learnt this from the Lord of Thanigai Hills, the great mentor who taught his own Father (Lord Shiva). The *The Great Book of the Songs of Divine Grace* notes as follows about this:

"When our young prodigy reached his study, he collected the requisites for worship, like the sacred lamp, fruits, flowers, incense, josh-sticks, camphor, sugar cubes, etc., lit the sacred lamp, hung a mirror on the wall, garlanded it, offered worship to it, and looked at it intently. In a short while, the graceful image of Lord Muruga of the Thanigai Hills appeared on it."

The Vision from Within

Indeed, Saint Ramalinga was not one to recollect like others, the image of Lord Muruga as an idol or a picture in the mind and offer worship to it. He stood a plain mirror before him and attempted to see the beautiful image of Lord Kandha by visualizing him in his mind's eye.

This was a new kind of worship. Devotees usually see the Lord from without, as a figure, and then see Him from within. But Saint Ramalinga first visualised the Lord from within and then saw the same image from without. Tradition has it that he was also

successful in it. A mirror reflects only the image of the onlooker. As Saint Ramalinga looked at it, forgetting his self, he saw the Lord whose self-same image he had visualized from *with in.*

Our young prodigy was deeply moved at the sight of Lord Muruga appearing on the mirror. Emotions welled up. In that state, he gushed forth with inspired verses. Here is one:

" The Beautiful Divine Faces Six,
Shoulders Twelve, adorned with *Kadamba* garlands,
A pair of Lotus Feet,
A sharp Spear and a Peacock,
A flag with a rooster emblazoned,
And the Thanigai Hills bounteous with merciful clouds,
I had a vision of."

Drawn to Thanigai!

Saint Ramalinga considered Thanigai, recently annexed to Tamil Nad, as a sacred seat of worship. As he had a hearty glimpse of the Lord, also with the range of the Thanigai Hills, he sang, "And the Thanigai Hills, bounteous with merciful clouds, I had a vision of." The devotees of Saint Ramalinga collected all his written verses, and divided them into five canons. Among them the whole of the fifth, (with the exception of a few poems), deals with Lord Muruga of the Thanigai Hills.

The Pained Heart!

Sabapathy Pillai, as brother with filial responsibilities to Ramalinga, after the death of the father, rejected him in anger, because he was not inclined to learn. Pained by this, Ramalinga deemed God as both his father and mother and sang:

"Unlettered dog I am,
Thou art my Protecting Mother,
Oh, My Beloved Father, my Master,
Lord of my Being,
God of all here.
Heaven and Earth know

Thou art my Father and Mother
Sinner that I am
May not I dream once
Of Thy commanding me to reach you
Upon the graceful Thanigai Hills,
By overmastering me,
In sympathy with my sorrow?"

Thus he sang of Lord Muruga who showed himself on the mirror, and he worshipped him with tearful devotion and intense constancy. A great seer among the Tamils, Ramalinga, had ardent love for the Lord of the Thanigai Hills. So he sang with zeal of Thanigai Hills, to be redeemed by the Tamils at a later period:

"Oh My Beloved!
Would I repair in joy to Holy Thanigai Hills?
Would I see to my heart's content
Thy Serene Grace?
"Oh! my Cherished One!
Would I wend my way to Thiruthanigai?
Would I not stand and stare
At Thy Beauty Fair?"

Ramalinga's Utterance

Tradition has it that Ramalinga was nine years old when he saw Lord Muruga reflected on the mirror. Even at an early age, the poor and unlettered boy had the power of seeing God before him. Saint Ramalinga's words prove this to be true:

"At an innocent age
He impelled me to Him
And bade me make verses
On the Beautiful Dancing Feet of the Lord"
"Oh, my Lord,
My good fortune it is
That Thou let me make verses

Marvelling at Thee
As my Supreme Master."

"When I was playing in the streets,
Thou adorned me with Thine
Garland of compelling Grace."

"Oh, Protector of my being!
Thou who made me chant
Thy Name in utterance sweet
Thou went pleased to over-master me
When I was innocent and young"

Thus sang he, even at that young age, of the consort of Goddess Valli, who had pervaded his heart and whose grace had caused his springs of poetic inspiration to gush forth. In his "Grand Petition of Truth!" also he says:

"God Unique! Thou remained in my heart, and gave me a rare inculcation of the discipline of learning, at my young age, without being taught by a teacher."

"You drew me to one of the divine languages of the South, through which you easily inculcated eternal knowledge and taught me to sing many kinds of devotional songs in those southern languages."

Thus he announces to the world the fact of his having learnt intuitively by the grace of Lord Muruga, in his 9th year. In many verses he adds the line, "My Lord! Thou wedded me in my playful age," revealing the privilege of his being blessed by God even when young.

The God-Ideal

Saint Ramalinga delineates Lord Muruga he saw on the looking glass, as follows:

"Six faces, twelve shoulders adorned with *Kadamba* garlands! two feet like lotus flowers; a sharp spear in hand; a peacock proudly carrying the Lord; a flag with the figure of a cock in it."

It is with these characteristics that the Lord of the Thanigai Hills appeared, says Saint Ramalinga.

Saint Ramalinga embodied a few philosophic ideals as Subramanya the Lord, and delighted in seeing him in the mirror. To explain this, Saint Ramalinga said: "Both the Gods, Ganapathy and Subramaniam stand for philosophic ideals only." These ideals, he symbolizes as Lord Subramaniam.

"What is *Subramaniam*? Between our eye-brows is situated a rotund, six-sided light of beauty. Elders call this radiant rotundity, *Shunmugam*. Apart from this, three regions above the base of our body, at the root of our tongue, to the left of the heart's seat, there is a six-dimensional pulsation. This is called *Subramaniam*. The combination of the six senses in our body represents pure knowledge which also known as *Shunmugam*. But Subramaniam is that mind which is suffused with the solace and serenity of the knowledge of the pure spirit, beyond the end of all philosophies."

(From the essay, *Subramaniam and Ethical Grace*)

On Idol Worship

There is a differencee between the "*Subramaniam*" that the mythologists show to the ignorant masses, and the "*Subramaniam*" that the Philosopher-Saint Ramalinga saw and revealed to us. What is Saint Ramalinga's view of people worshipping idols made of metal and stone? Listen now to his views:

"Those who begin to be aware of God must continue to be aware of Him. Those who begin the worship of idols must continue to do it. The devotees concerned should be aware that that these are two immediate means available to them. *Vigraham* (idol) means *a special place* (abode). All living bodies are the abode (*Graham*) of the Soul. The idol represents the divine abode from which must emanate the Divine Light. If properly and devoutly worshipped, the Divine Light will emanate from these idols, which stand for divine bodies, and grant grace."

"From immemorial times to this day, it has been demonstrated that by devotion, great souls like Arunagiri Nathar, Kumaraguruparar and Nackeerar achieved immaculate saintliness and immortality. Therefore, we should all worship that true God, with genuine devotion, as enjoined in scriptures, and receive His Grace."

The Great Book of the Songs of Divine Grace

These are the words of Saint Ramalinga. It is his view that the purport of idol worship should be truly understood and offered, with a pure heart. The worship of an idol, without a proper understanding as to why we worship, and because it is traditionally done, is only a worship of the *stone* and not the worship of God, That is why Saint Ramalinga desired the end of all superstitious practices, in his verses. His poetic heir Bharati, also says:

"If the people of our land should act in accordance with what the temple priests say, then, the priests should interpret matters in such a manner as not to hide anything from the people, or deceive them in any matter." (*The Essays of Bharati*: "*Philosophy*").

The Heart is the Shrine!

Saint Ramalinga enshrined Lord Subramaniam in his heart. He attained great bliss by seeing on the glass that Infinite Form with in the deepest recesses of his heart, as a result of his spiritual powers. "Pure Knowledge alone is Divine", says Saint Ramalinga. Saint Thayumanava also sang that "Pure Knowledge alone is Shiva".

Great poet Bharati sings:

"Hark ye! The scriptures sing,
Pure Knowlege is God;
Lose the Glory, Will, ye,
Baffled by crazy creeds so many?

Hark ye! The scriptures proclaim
The Soul that shines
As the inner light of all that lives
Is the Infinite Brahma."

Swami Vivekananda says:

"The Infinite Spirit is hidden in the awareness of everyman What we should do is to bring out the hidden divinity by sway over the external and internal worlds."

It is thus that the child-poet Ramalinga saw in the mirror the Infinite Spirit, hidden in his awareness.

Kavimani Desiga Vinayakam Pillai has composed verses on the fact of this *Inner Light*, in a manner that even laymen can understand. They are as follows:

"My dear Girl! Know that God is with in.
If you see Him with in,
The shrine is with in.

It profits little
To offer worship to God,
When in pleasing fancies,
You are lost in the woods!"

The great saint-poet Vemana of Andhra Pradesh exhorts with compassion: "Why do you build big shrines with stones? Why do you suffer needlessly without realizing God with in you?"

When the Divine, hidden from within, manifests itself, the Infinite appears in the self same form that the devotees desire to see. Lord Subramaniam is a Tamil God, and God of the Tamils. Hence Saint Ramalinga, a Tamil, saw in the mirror the God of the Tamil Race.

Thiru Vi Ka's Utterance

The *Thiru Arutpa*, (*The Songs of Divine Grace*), which Saint Ramalinga composed consists of six sacred canons. Using norms of reason, he condemns superstitious beliefs in the sixth canon. His poems, devoted to the worship of the Lord of the Thanigai Hills, in the 5th canon, gave him that ability. The following views are expressed by the great Tamil scholar, Thiru Vi. Kalyanasundaranar:

"Saint Ramalinga worshipped Lord Muruga right when young. He was deeply steeped in Muruga worship. He saw the righteous path of salvation, by his visiting the Thanigai Hills, and by his constant, and tearful entreaties to the Lord. The tears he shed, thinking of the Thanigai Hills, purified him and elevated him to a higher state."

The 5th sacred canon features Saint Ramalinga's impassioned entreaties concerning his grievances, with a disciplined mind, before the Lord of the Thanigai Hills. This canon deals with the ways of

the seasoning of life. It must be remembered, the 5th canon dwells on the imperfections of Man, and also shows the way for removing them. It is my conviction that the 5th sacred canon shows the way for the great benefits found in the 6th sacred canon."

Bharati who blazed a trail in religious reform and revolution, following the path of Saint Ramalinga, says: "Gods do not grant blessings to those who merely adulate idols and mythologies, without knowing the purport." (*The Mind of Saint Ramalinga, pp,* 130-131)

The "Matter Upstairs"

Young Saint Ramalinga, pretending to study in the room upstairs, out of fear for his brother, Sabapathy Pillai, was "clandestinely" in love with Lord Kandha. His brother and his wife thought that the "youngster was deep in study upstairs!" But Saint Ramalinga, in intense love for the Lord of the Thanigai Hills, repeatedly sang of His Grace, and attained inner purity.

In due course, the brother and his wife came to know of the "matter" upstairs. But the sister -in-law, Pappathi Ammal, not so much worried over her brother-in-law's lack of inclination for study, desired to listen to his devoted singing. Saint Ramalinga was infatuated by Saint Manickavasaga's *Songs of Thiruvasagam*. He considered Manickavasaga's utterance, "If I cry, I can reach you!" as a gospel. Every day, whenever an opportunity came, he offered songs of praise to the Lord:

"Is it Grace that Thou shouldst refuse,
In my dream at least,
The beauty of Thy blossom-feet,
That well-versed devotees extol?

Alas! With none to welcome me
Where will I go?
If Thy devotees denounce me
As an imposter,
And tell me, "Go away, you jealous one".

He used to sing with such tearful tenderness and devotion. He also sang in beatific joy, thus:

"Seek will I the richly endowed Thanigai Hills?
Sing will I the glory of Lord Muruga?
Dance will I in reverence?
Swim will I in the sea of Grace?
Hush will I my body's ecstasy?
Unite will I with the true devotees?
Renounce will I this world full of falsehood?
Plant I will not my feet on earth!"

IV

THE RELIGIOUS PREACHER

Sabapathy Pillai was intensely attached to the Saivite Religion. He worshipped at the temple every day, and he was an accomplished religious preacher. Because of these reasons, he was somewhat mollified by the change in his brothers conduct. The sister-in-law, of course, became Saint Ramalinga's disciple.

The House of Somu Chettiar!

Sabapathy Pillai gave weekly religious discourses at the residence of Thiru Somu Chettiar at Muthiayalpet in Madras. One day, a ceremonial function to install a golden image of Lord Nataraja was got up. Sabapathy Pillai had consented to discourse on the history of the Saint of Seerkazhi, Sree Gnanasambanda. But, owing to sudden illness, he was unable to fulfil his promise. He undertook religious preaching, not only as a duty to the Saivite Religion, but also as a calling to earn a livelihood. He was afraid that his influence would wane, if he failed in his duty at these celebrations, and was worried that Thiru Somu Chettiar would be dismayed.

The Brother to the Rescue!

At this juncture, Pappathi Ammal suggested, with the wisdom of a minister, that if his brother was sent, he would expound a few verses, and satisfy the people gathered at the celebrations. After getting her husband's approval, she spoke to her brother-in-law, and

also obtained his consent. Sabapathy Pillai told his brother to give an exposition of a few verses and do the usual worship, and request Chettiar to excuse him for his indisposition. Young Ramalinga who had waited for this opportunity, went to Chettiar's residence, and told him of the purpose of his visit. Chettiar might have thought of him as a poor substitute, but not wanting to miss this opportunity, received him hospitably. Our rare gem of Tamil learning began the discourse at 9 p.m. but went on till midnight. Even then, the exposition of only two lines of the history of Saint Gnanasambanda was completed. The audience was captivated by the intuitive clarity of Ramalinga's interpretations, which it did not find in others. In religious dis courses, it was customary, under the pretext of citing authority, to say all kinds of things of a low order, just to make people laugh, thus putting an end to their power of thinking. Even in those days, this attitude was probably found among religious preachers. Saint Ramalinga's discourse was an exception to this.

How to Sing?

Saint Ramalinga laid down, in later days, the grammar for singing devotional songs thus:

"Immortal Manickavasaka!
When I sing Thy Song Supreme,
Losing myself,
Like the sweetness of the juice of choice sugarcane,
Like the sweetness of honey and milk,
Like the splendid sweetness of a fully ripe fruit,
All mingled together!
It suffuses my body and soul
Oh! It's sweetness never surfeits!"

In *Aludaiya Adigal Arulmalai* (*A Garland of Divine Songs on the Divine Son.*)

Whatever song is sung, it must be sung with a singleness of devotion so that its meaning suffuses both body and soul, believed Saint Ramalinga. That was why he said, "when I sing, losing myself". If the song and the singer's mind were apart, there is then no efficacy in it.

The audience at Somu Chettiar's place was enthralled because Saint Ramalinga sang with a singleness of devotion, harmonizing the matter and the manner of singing. It requested Ramalinga to continue and finish the exposition of the entire account. He also consented to give religious discourses, which was his brother's vocation, and which he considered only as a duty.

Sabapathy Doubts!

Though Sabapathy was happy over his brother's unique recognition, he was doubtful whether his brother was capable of attracting people by giving religious discourses. A short history in *The Great Book of the Songs of Divine Grace* gives the following account about the method he followed and the clarification he obtained:

On a day, he hid himself in a corner at the place where his brother gave the discourse, and listened to it. As he listened, he began to doubt whether the lecturer was his brother; he had a glimpse again, and decided it was his brother.

"He who had the capacity to learn by himself, I let him go out to learn. I was vexed at heart by his disinclination. Oh! I even refused him food and clothes. Alas! All my actions were those of a madman who did not understand his greatness!" Thus he exclaimed in regret and amazement and began to conduct himself before his brother with deep respect. But our Saint did not like what he did.

Saint Gnanasambanda, the Mentor

Saint Ramalinga had learnt by heart the songs of *Thevaram* and *Thiruvasakam* even during his boyhood. Because of that he was deeply interested in Saint Gnanasambanda, and also deemed him his mentor. Later on, he composed many songs of invocation to Saint Gnanasambanda and published them under the title, *A Garland of Divine Songs on the Divine Son*,

Oh, Splendrous Lamp of the Divine
Line of famed Seerkazhi!
Oh, never surfeiting honey
That sweetens the heart! Eternal wealth!

"Oh, *Karpaga* Tree grown on the
Coral hills of roaring clouds!
Oh! Sugarcane! Fruit! My pair
Of eyes! The Apple of my eyes!
Oh, Sweet Child! Lisping young one
That drank the Divine Milk
At the darling age of three!
Companion of my Soul!
Oh, Renowned Saint Gnanasambanda!
Those that speak thy glory
Will enjoy ever-increasing wealth."

In this song, he sketches his extreme devotion to Saint Gnanasambanda.

"Oh, My Divine Guide Gnanasambanda,
Nectar pure of great Seerkazhi!
Oh! My eternal Gnanasambanda
Wealth of noble Seerkazhi!"

Singing thus, he declares to the world that it was his mentor, Saint Gnanasambanda, who made him a savant.

"What shall I say of thy unique Grace!
Thou hast enabled me to attain in one day
Knowledge that is rarely achieved in an eternity."

In these lines, he explains what blessings be received from Saint Gnanasambanda.

It is Saint Ramalinga's belief that it was Lord Muruga who incarnated himself as Saint Gnanasambanda.
He declares this in the lines from his *Lay on Lord Shanmuga*:

"He was called Gnanasambanda.
He flourished to nourish Saivism.

He will not reside in false hearts.

Praise the golden feet of that saint

Oh, Dear Girls!"

Is the *Periya Puranam*, a figment of the Imagination?

If such a person as Saint Ramalinga who had great love for Saint Gnanasambanda, and who accepted him as his incomparable guide, was to give his religious discourses on Saint Gnanasambanda, at the residence of Somu Chettiar, in Muthiyalpet, how to describe the intrinsic quality of these discourses? As it was a special lecture by an ardent disciple, on the greatness of his master, the entire audience was thrilled.

The account of Saint Thirugnanasambanda is a part of the *Periya Puranam*, composed by Sekkizhar. It is appropriate here to bring out Saint Ramalinga's views on the *Periya Puranam.*

"All the 63 saints to whom the *Periya Puranam* refers, represent only philosophic ideals and nothing else. If each one is followed, after enquiry, then each one will bestow a unique power.

Philosophic concepts underlie all epics. This truth will be evident at length in the Pure and Righteous Path."

Thus notes Saint Ramalinga under the title, "Sacred observations on the Pure and Righteous Path of Harmony", in the prose-sections of the *Thiruvarutpa* (*The Songs of Divine Grace*).

A majority of Saivite savants considers the *Periya Puranam* a historical work. The views of the great scholar, C.K.Subramania Mudaliar, as a commentator on the *Periya Puranam*, are as follows:

"Though this is called mythology it is created on a historically authentic basis."

"A few among the epigraphical and historical researchers, on finding that areas in the epic agree closely with their conclusions, have opined that Sekkizhar had composed his epic as a result of the findings he had arrived at by his own epigraphical research."

(*Tamil Encyclopaedia,* Vol.VII, p. 596)

Gandhiji on the Gita

Whether they are mythologies, or epics, it cannot be wholly true that line for line they are strictly either historical works or imaginative stories. They should be considered only as philosophic stories, based on history. On the *Mahabharata*, and on the *Gita* which is considered as one of its parts, Gandhiji holds the following views:

"When I read the *Gita* for the first time, during 1888-1889, it occurred to me that it was not a historical work, and that, based on materialistic conflicts, it described the eternal moral struggle that goes on in the heart of every man. To drive home this moral struggle, a tory dealing with war, full of soldiers, had been invented. This thought which appeared superficially, strengthened itself when I con-emplated deeply on the *Gita* and on righteousness. After perusing the *Mahabharata*, it crystalized more firmly.

I do not accept that, like the histories of the nations of today, he *Mahabharata* too is history. Adequate proof could be found for his even at the beginning. By the very description of the superhuman birth of the hero and the heroine, Saint Vyasar had prevented the thought that his *Mahabharata* is the history of kings and citizens of this world." (*Anahsakti Yoga*: *The Preface*)

Either is True!

The view that Gandhiji has expressed on the epic, *Mahabharata*, also holds good for mythological literatures like the *Periya Puranam*. Saint Ramalinga does not say that the *Periya Puranam* is fiction, with no bearing on history. Similarly, he does not also state that, line for line, it has a historical bearing. He has interpreted by connecting the 63 saints to 63 philosophic principles. He proposed to explain this in depth and detail in the work, *The Pure and Righteous Path*, (Sudha Sanmarga) which he planned to write and bring out. We would have been able to understand Saint Ramalinga's point of view about the *Periya Puranam*, had we been able to obtain this work. Unfortunately for us, before the publication of that work, Saint Ramalinga was no more. Without proper explanation, therefore, we cannot consider the views expressed by Saint Ramalinga as definitive conclusions.

The history concerning the *Periya Puranam* has it that when Sekkizhar began the work, Lord Nataraja of Chidambaram gave him the first line of the composition with "*All the World over*."

"All the world over, the Rare One to be realized and invoked,
And He who wears the Moon and the Ganga in His hair,
And the Immeasurable Light Divine who dances in Chidambaram
Let us worship and praise the flower like feet with anklets."

"All the World Over"

Saint Ramalinga has given a very extended interpretation of "*All the World Over*" with which the invocation of the *Periya Puranam* begins.

In the first day's discourse at Muthiyalpet, he spent a large part of his time in the interpretion of "*All the World over*" of the invocation. We find it in the prose-section of *The Songs of Divine Grace*, under the title, *Meimozhi Porul Vilakkam*: (*Scriptures Explained*).

The Revolution Mythologies Caused!

These days, the "great geniuses" who were not educated through heir mother-tongue, reject what are "mythologies" as entirely fiction, and as needless for the scientific era. Those who love their mother tongue and who believe in God cannot so easily reject mythologies. Whatever be the present position, we cannot deny that in olden days, for many centuries, people read and also orally heard mythological literatures, and attained knowledge. In those days, when journals and printed books were not available, securing knowledge from books was not possible for all. Knowledge had to be gained through oral inculcation. In such a situation, the credit of fostering knowledge of Tamil, and moulding the Tamils outlook, by inventing interesting stories, goes to authors of mythological literatures and to religious preachers. Why? Even now, we do see people in villages, gaining enlightenmen, by listening to religious discourses.

Among the religious preachers of today, Thiru Muruga Kripanandha Variyar uses his scholarship in his mother tongue, and his speaking-skill, gained by divine grace, only for the good of the people. It is because of the services of such persons as he that there is a continued respect for mythologies, atleast among a certain section of the people.

Those who believe mythological stories as historical occurences should bear one thing in mind. It is this: There cannot be one kind of historical research for religion, and another kind for other areas.

Also, we are enthusiastic in introducing our children to methods of examining anything, with a historical research bent of mind, and we compulsorily involve them in such novel educational methods. A few among us even deem this a privilege. In such a situation, how can those mythologies which we worship with so much care and devotion, escape from historical research?

The Storm of Reform

Our mythologies, apart from being devotional works, are also interesting literatures, full of characters. So, they cannot escape from literary criticism. We should approach mythological stories in the light of this context. Orthodox interpretations should achieve an ability to give such philosophic explanations of the mythological stories as to satisfy both historical researchers and literary critics. Saint Ramalinga had such an ability as to amaze the entire Tamil World.

In the lines under the title, *The Opening of the Sacred Doors*, in the radically reformistic 6th Canon,

> "You showed me the subtleties and intricacies
> Of the codes of the Scriptures, the canons
> The code proclaimed by the ancient mythologies
> And the codes prescribed by the epics.
> You made me learn them as they are",

he declares that without being attracted, like the rest, by the stories that mythologies tell, and understanding and interpreting their subtleties, he became aware of the right purport. On the contrary, he condemns those superstitious beliefs which look upon the imaginative account of mythologies as true:

"Let blind traditions which glorify the fancies of art as real, find their grave!" Elsewhere, we shall deal in detail with Saint Ramalinga's views on the evils resulting from a blind faith in mythologies.

Pilgrimage to Tiruvotriyoor

Ramalinga was "released" from the room upstairs, because of Sabapathy Pillai's change of heart. As a result, he began a pilgri-

mage to Tiruvotriyoor. Several centuries ago, when Saint Pattinatthar saw Tiruvotriyoor, he sang with devotional insight:

"Wherever there is a tank there is holy water,
Wherever there is sand there is holy-ash,
Wherever there is shelter there resides Lord Ganapathy,
This is Tiruvotriyoor the Realm of Shiva on Earth,
So extol true devotees."

Reaching Tiruvotriyoor, Saint Ramalinga keenly desired to offer daily worship and obeisance before Lord Thiagesan and receive His Grace. Should not the mind co-operate with him? In the following lines, he entreats his deceiving heart:

"Wish thou the Life of the Great Lord Shiva
Or the Life of the Good Lord Vishnu?
Wish thou to become like Brahma
Or like the Befitting Indhra?
Whatever thou wisheth thou shalt get it, oh! Heart!
I shall grant thee everything today
If thou cometh with me to Otriyoor
Where flourishes my Lord Shiva,
His entangled hair adorned with *Vanni*."

As Saint Ramalinga was the favoured son of the Lord, his dictates of the heart, fearful of him, impelled him towards Tiruvotriyoor. Saint Ramalinga went on foot from Seven Wells to Tiruvotriyoor, not for a single day, but for many days. The 2nd Canon of *The Songs of Divine Grace* collects the deeply moving devotional songs of Saint Ramalinga on Lord Thiagesa of Tiruvotriyoor.

Here is one of the songs:

"Extolled by the ensconced Lords, Vishnu and Brahmah
Thou attained the sacred name *Thiaga* (Liberal *Guru*),
Giver of boons, when I approach thee,
Thou do not utter a single word.

Why did Thou obtain the name *Thiaga*?

Thou who grants nothing to those who supplicate?"

In these lines, he chides the Lord who bears the name *Thiagesa* but who does not grant him the Grace desired.

Saint Ramalinga used to stand before the idol of Lord Muruga at the inner corridor of the Tiruvotriyoor Thiagesa Temple, and offer worship, sometimes singing, sometimes standing still as a statue, shedding tears, and with arms folded above his head.

As our Ramalinga has now reached youthhood, from boyhood we will hereafter call him Ramalingam Pillai. Did not even he, while singing of God, deem himself His Son, (*Pillai*)? So, we will not be wrong in calling him *Pillai* (son), in the same manner.

Author

The intuitive scholar that Ramalingam Pillai was, he had acquired a remarkable scholarship in Tamil literature and grammar, to the amazement of many a scholar. Many learned men proudly gathered round him, like the stars around the moon.

On the request of Kancheepuram Sabapathy Mudaliar, that Saint Ramalingam bring out a prose-primer for young boys, he consented and brought out a Reader called *Manumuraikanda Vasakam.*

Among Savants

Padikkasu Pulavar wrote a book called *Thondamandala Sathakam.* There arose among scholars a doubt as to whether the book is to be called *Thondaimandalam*, or *Thondamandalam*. Both sides represented their case to Saint Ramalinga. Impartial minded Ramalingam Pillai, citing enough grammatical authorities, opined that "only *Thondamandalam* was right".

Some scholars blamed Ramalingam Pillai from behind his back that he was not a scholar in *Sangam Literature*, though he was well-read in religious literatures. There was among them one, a great scholar, by the name of Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar, who composed a parody of 100 songs in a difficult style, and brought them to Saint Ramalinga, stating that they were made available to him from ancient

manuscripts, and that they should be songs of the *Sangam Age*. Ramalingam Pillai who had the capacity to convert to goodness even those who go astray, remarked that those poems were written by a novice, not proficient in the principles of grammar; and that they were not songs of the *Sangam Age*, and if so, would not abound in so many mistakes.

On hearing this and from that time onwards, Thozhuvoor Mudaliar, devoid of pride, became the disciple of *Marudhoor* Pillai. Though there were inumerable disciples later on, only Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar was the principal disciple of Saint Ramalinga. Saint Ramalinga taught him right from that time Sanskrit and enlarged his knowledge of Tamil Literature and Grammar, and honoured him with the title, *Ubhaya Kalanidhi Perum Pulávar*.

White Robed Ascetic

Tamil scholars, heads of Saivite monastaries, and also those from outside Madras approached the young saint Ramalinga, and learnt thoroughly all that they should from him. His residence became a temple for Mother Tamil. By this time, the Saint of Marudhoor had composed the first two canons of the *Thiruarutpa* (*Songs of Divine Grace*) eand had earned Divine Grace. He was averse to married life ,and lived as a white-robed ascetic. In his *Song of Petitions*,

"Loving mothers, a thousand be!
Oh! Great Lord! Can they equal Thee?

Joyous fathers, innumerable be!
Oh! My Lord! Can they equal Thee?

Thou valiant Lord, with jewellery adorned,
My Lord, the father! I swear by Thee.

I have no dearer mate than Thee.
Ashamed of myself I am, Oh! Master!

My faults Thou alone can forbear,
Thou with flower-feet,

Unattainable even by Lord Vishnu in penance.
Do not betray me to *Yama* (the Lord of Death),

Do not immerse me in the sea of bondage and birth,
In this ocean embraced earth,"

he impassionately appealed to God for His Grace. While entreating Him, he reveals his dislike for domestic life, and describes the condition of his heart as being full of divine avocations, wholly free from carnal appetites:

"Wallowing in scornful existence I suffer,
Vascillating at heart about what's to come,
With none to redeem me from the cruel prison
Of burdensome life on earth I despair,
With one leg in the path of redemption,
And another in the mire of worldly attachments, I wear away,
Lost in the desert of bewildering life,
I languish in thirst for the water of Thy Grace Divine."

An Appeal to his Heart!

Young Ramalinga, having reached the age of marriage, disliked marriage, and longed for a life wedded to the Divine. But his heart prevented him from a final decision. The mind yearned for the Grace of God; the heart sought the carnal pleasures of a maiden. There raged an intense struggle. Saint Ramalinga entreated his heart:

"You try to cast me
Into the pit of the lust for women,
Profit you do not,
But sin by thus spoiling me."

Not knowing his mind, his mother and his brother were determined to get him married.

The Lover of God!

As Saint Ramalinga, like the heroine falling in love with the hero, fell in love with God who had robbed his heart, he could not love anyone else. His mother did not know of this. She planned to marry him to the comely maiden, Dhanakodi, daughter of Saint Ramalinga's eldest sister, Unnamulai Ammal. Having got to know this, young Ramalinga tearfully entreated the Lord whom he deemed his mother to stop the wedding, desired by his mother:

My Lord! What shall I say of Thy play?
Innocent lad that I am Thou hath imprisoned my
Soul in the dark room of this house of holes
Made of flesh and blood. Alas! Mother!
Did you bring me up to be smitten by the fire
Of hunger,
The intellectual faculties being captured
By the devil of the senses,
And oppressed by the tyranny of lust?

Mother Unaware!

His mother would not give up! She preached to the preacher: "A life that is domestic is the most righteous". Not finding that efficacious, she tried to change her son's mind through an ascetic devoted to Lord Shiva, who was greatly respected by Ramalinga. He reminded him of sage Valluvar's utterance: "Righteousness is the basis of domestic life". He showed him the scene of the Great Lord with his goodly consort. Ramalinga was silent in distress and shyness. Taking that as consent, the mother and the brother finalized the marriage. Alas! What a pity!

The Lotus Pond!

The family of Saint Ramalinga is like a pond of blooming lotuses. Does the pond know of the glory of the lotus? Similarly, not knowing the mind and greatness of young Ramalinga, his family undertook to solemnize his wedding. Generally, in weddings, it is the bridegroom who leads the bride. In this unmatural marriage, one should say, it was the bride who led the bridegroom, while going round the sacred fire!

At the Nuptial Bower ... ...!

There was the nuptial night after marriage! In the nuptial bower were Ramalingam and Dhanakodi! Did they engage themselves in love-play? No! There was worship to God! We had known earlier of Ramalingam Pillai's boundless love for Saint Manickavasaga's *Thiruvasakam*. We now know that even the nuptial-bower was not out of bound for his devotion to *Thiruvasakam*. It was Saint Arunagiri

who sang: "Even when I am in love with women, I shall think of the peacock and the spear of Lord Muruga. Even when I drink to my heart's content the intoxicating wine of love from lithesome damsels and drowse, I shall not forget the spear of Lord Muruga!"

But Saint Ramalinga, renouncing the pleasures of a woman, recited a paean on the Supreme Lord. Alas! What a sorry state Dhanakodi was in who trusted him and wished to support him in all matters! Like the humorous proverb, "to be a bachelor, even after marriage", Saint Ramalinga, though married to Dhanakodi, went about as a bachelor, without living with her.

An Incompatible Marriage!

This incompatible marriage is indeed a warning to human society! Bharati who sang in disgust, at a later time, of his own child-marriage, curses society, deep in tears, in a poem:

" They destroyed me by devising
Scriptures, rituals, observances,
Omens, slogans, sacred bell and *thali* (a sign of marriage)
They never showed me what is right and proper,
They committed acts, evil, foolish and false,
And called them codes of wisdom.
When elders sham thus,
How can an ignorant lad discover virtue? "

Perhaps, Dhanakodi also should have thought in the same way about her incompatible marriage. All our sympathies go to the bride! Blameless, she was subjected to great cruelty!

The restraints and controls women undergo in Indian society are countless. Even if we say they are millions of million, it will be appropriate. Surmounting all these inhibitions, the wife leans on the husband like a creeper winding round a pole! If the husband lets her down, what an unfortunate situation she is in!

To his Disciples... ...

Saint Ramalinga never spoke demeaningly of women leading a domestic life. Nor did he advise others to give up domestic life. In

a letter to one of his disciples, who, out of devotion to Lord Shiva, refused to marry, Saint Ramalinga states as follows:

"With constant devotion to Lord Shiva, from within, one can marry a thousand girls, from with out. If we marry, Lord Shiva will not make us feel sorry. Therefore, you can happily consent for marriage. We need not prevent it. According to time, place and means we should experience in fair measure what is to be experienced. If His is the Divine Will, what right have we to stop them? We should deem them to be the outcome of the Divine Will."

Thiruarutpa, (*The Songs of Divine Grace*) Vol.V, pp. 32-33, published by Thiru P. Balakrishna Pillai)

This is from a part of a letter, written on 27-5-1860, by Saint Ramalinga, to Thiru Rathina Mudaliar, after his marriage.

Though Saint Ramalinga could not personally bless the marriage of Thiru Rathina Mudaliar, which look place with his consent, he wrote, regretful of his absence, thus:

"Though I was not fortunate to witness your marriage, I was happy to hear of it. Please write to me often, giving an account of your happy life. Without giving up your thoughts of Lord Shiva, you should carry on your duties of life with great care.

Thiruarutpa, (*The Songs of Divine Grace*) Vol.V, pp. 33-4, published by Thiru P. Balakrishna Pillai)

The Saint advised his disciples to lead a domestic life, but failed to live with the woman he married. This was perhaps because of the Divine Will!

On Renunciation!

We do understand, that Saint Ramalinga was one who did no support an asceticism that renounced domestic life.

"Ascetics who were attached to the triple desires of life and who have no charitable disposition should adopt renunciation. Those, free from these blemishes, need not renounce domestic life. They can be ascetics at home". This view of Saint Ramalinga is found in the

sermon-section of the *Songs of Divine Grace.* Perhaps perfect ascetics like Saint Ramalinga were an exception to the views expressed, above!

If mental and personal characteristics are compatible, then asceticism at the domestic level can be practised, along with the wife. There have been those who lived accordingly. The lines in Bharati's *Autobiography* emphasised this:

"Know ye that
Even fasting and doing penance
For a thousand years,
Rarely can yield
A wife like those that Vasishta, Rama
And Valluvar of yore were blessed with!"

Saint Ramakrishna Paramahamsa too, without staying away from his wife, Sharadamani Devi, practised penance and achieved communion with God.

The Traditions of Tamils

The abnegation of the wife in observing asceticism is contrary to the tradition of Tamils. Just as the wife does not have the right to break the contract of marriage, after the marriage, so also the the husband has no right to break the contract, and this literature demonstrates.

Manimegalai who renounced domestic life, observed the vow of asceticism even in her days of maidenhood. Saint Periyalvar's beautiful daughter, Andal, refusing to marry a man, married Lord Krishna in spirit.

An Exception!

The history of Karaikkal Ammaiyar is an exception to this tradition. Only after desertion by a man whom she married and with whom she lived, that she sought the Grace of God, and received this sanctuary. As though to uphold the tradition of Tamils, and offset the flaw, Sekkizhar tells the "story" that she divested herself of her fleshly body which belonged to her husband, and assumed the shape of a feminine spirit, and only after that she sought the Divine Grace of God.

"Discarding the fair and fleshly form
That I bear for this man,
I should with Thy Grace become
An apparition to supplicate at Thy feet.

Whatever be his defence, the latter part of Karaikkal Ammaiyar's life is contrary to the tradition of the Tamils.

Not an Exception, but an Accident!

It cannot be said that Saint Ramalinga was similarly placed. Even the act of marriage took place against his thought and wish. A marriage contract arises only when the man and the woman are united in spirit. Saint Ramalinga, in a lyric, describes God as a hero and himself a heroine in love with Him.

"In my innocence He wedded me,
When I know He desires not to know me,
Wrong I have never done,
To see a damsel in distress,
Fair is it to the Lord?"

If Dhanakodi Ammal had the ability to compose (verses), doubtless, she would have also sung of Saint Ramalinga in the same way!

Even after releasing himself from the bond of marriage, Saint Ramalinga stayed in the city of Madras for a few years. As he had renounced the pleasures of domestic life and become an ascetic, we will hereafter call him Saint Ramalinga to indicate he was an ascetic, instead of calling him Ramalingam Pillai.

Worship at Tiruvotriyoor

We had, already mentioned that Saint Ramalinga, while in Madras went often to Tiruvotriyoor to worship Lord Thiagesa with intense devotional singing. Thus, he composed innumerable lyrics on Lord Thiagesa and his consort Vadivudaiammai, in intrinsically beautiful Tamil.

Lord Thiagesa of Tiruvotriyoor was also known as the Great Divine Teacher. Saint Ramalinga made a garland of odes on the Divine Teacher.

"Oh my Father! Teacher Divine of Otriyoor!
Dog that I am, confused by bewildering thoughts,
Is it just that Thou shouldst make me suffer in mean existence,
Without redeeming me from the sins of the previous birth
And letting me supplicate at Thy feet?".

"Will ye let me wallow in lust for dark-eyed beauties?
Will ye let me with my hands hold Thy Feet?
This way or that know I not
What Thy Will is, Oh, Lord, the Teacher Divine."

In these songs, he depicts his mind as struggling against the evil forces of his previous birth, and appeals to the Lord for success in his struggle.

Departure from Thiruvotriyoor

Saint Ramalinga, when he was a baby, worshipped Lord Nataraja of Chidambaram, nodding his head in acknowledgement and heartily smiling at the Lord. Now his mind was drawn only towards Chidambaram, though the external surroundings pressed him to stay on in Tiruvotriyoor. He pleads before the Lord in his mental confusion and appeals to Him to grant him a clear vision thus:

"To be free from misery,
Am I to stay in Otriyoor,
Or to go am I to Thillai,
Oh, Lord Shiva!
I am at a loss as to know what to do."

Religious Masters like Appar, Sundarar, Thirugnanasambanda and Manickavasaga went on religious pilgrimages, and greatly adored every religious centre and sang of its glories. It was through the songs of *Thevaram* and *Thiruvasagam* a countless number of such centres in Tamil Nadu had attained everlasting fame. Therefore whenever some sacred seat is mentioned, the tradition of describing it as a seat celebrated in song, has come to stay. It was a custom to call those places visited by Heads of of Saivite Religion, as "Great Seats", and because of this practice, even humble places were

transformed into towns and cities, showing Tamils as superior in culture to other communities in India.

Kandharkottam

The credit of bringing renown to a seat of worship, namely, "Kandharkottam", not celebrated by other religious heads, goes to Saint Ramalinga. During his stay in Madras, he repaired to Kandharkottam frequently and worshipped Lord Kandha, by composing many songs upon him on his own. It is said that whenever he was there, he would be in a trance, forgetting his physical being for many hours there. Of the lyrics he devoted to Lord Kandha, we shall single out some here:

"Oh, famed Lord of the Kandha Shrine at Sylvan Chennai!
Doing many kind deeds, pleasing all,
Giving grace as to abound in wealth,
Full of love, compassion and strength,
To acquire humility and the felicity of full knowledge,
Fair as the fragrant red lotus,
With the suffusion of evergrowing grace,
Spontaneous gush of sweet and incomparable nectar,
Embodiment of bliss,
Effulgent radiance full of divinity and wisdom,
Riding high the peacock,
Thy holy feet grant succour to all.
I extol them in my heart.
When is the day to come
For me to attain the wealth of Thy Grace?
Oh, Gracious Lord Serene! Indwelling Gem!
Oh, Shanmuga! Lord Supreme!"

Like the chimes of the bell at the time of worship in the temple of Lord Kandha, this song, when it ends, repeats the name of the Lord thrice, pleasing our soul.

It is because Saint Ramalinga sang in praise of Kandharkottam that we see it flourishing even today in prosperity, pious

righteousness and devotion. Let Kandharkottam grow from strength to strength.

The Greatness of the Devotees

Further, Saint Ramalinga also heartily sings in praise of the glory of the devotees, as follows:

"Oh, Lord! The lips of the beloved who extol Thy greatness
Are lips that have gladly drunk the divine nectar.

Oh, Father! The heads of the devoted who adore Thy Holy Feet
Are heads that are adorned with crown.

Oh, God True! The eyes of the blessed who see Thy Sacred Form
Are eyes that grow with radiance.

Oh, Lord Vela! The ears of the wise who hear Thy glory
Are ears that taste the felicity of festivals.

Oh, God Pure! The souls of the lofty who think of Thy feet
Are souls that are blessed with bliss.

Oh, Master! The hands of the great who worship in reverence before Thy Holiness
Are hands that shower gold

Oh, famed Lord of the Kandha shrine at prosperous Chennai,

Oh, Gracious Lord Serene! Indwelling Gem

Oh, Shunmuga! Lord Supreme!"

The Glorious Song

Among the songs of Saint Ramalinga in praise of Lord Kandha, there is one that has achieved immortal fame among devotees which we shall see now:

Oh, famed Lord of the Kandha Shrine at bountiful Chennai.

Let me have the kinship of the good who supplicate
Thy Holy Feet with singleness of devotion,
Let me shun the company of hypocrites,
Let me ever extol Thy renowned glory,
Let me never utter falsehood,
Let me follow the righteous path,
Let me be free from pride,
Let me forego the desire for women,
Let me never forget Thee.
Give me wisdom,
Give me the wealth of Thy Grace,
Give me good health.
Oh, Gracious Lord Serene! Indwelling Gem!
Oh, Shunmuga! Lord Supreme!

The Tamil world has for a century heard and sung this song for sheer pleasure and devotional unction.

"Manickavasaka of prophetic words,
Of all your verses, only one
Unites me with my Lord."

Thus sings, Saint Ramalinga of Manickavasaka. Similarly, this ongs from the *Thiruarutpa* is a divine one indeed, enabling devotees to become one with Lord Kandha. Hence, this song has found a place in the heart of every Tamil.

The Desire for Women

Saint Ramalinga says in the above lyric, "Let me forego the desire for women". This reveals emphatically his abhorrence for the desire for women. But this is what he utters at his level, as a complete ascetic, and thus cannot be taken as an advice to householders. His ideal also must have been the same. We have already cited the example of his letter to a friend, exhorting him to marry. We shall also cite now Saint Ramalinga's good wishes to a new groom:

"Let Muruga Pillai, the bridegroom, be blessed with long life, prosperity and children...... I have to let you know something important. You should cherish tradition, show compassion, and love kith and kin. You are newly married! You may not care to remember people like me! Hence this reminder."

This letter was written on 31-5-1958. We understand from this that, except in his own case, he did not prevent others from marriage and leading a domestic life. Those like him, who follow a life of complete renunciation should have to forget indeed the carnal embrace of a woman!

Even at the personal level, he does not hate womankind, but only eschews the carnal desires for them.

Pilgrimage

Saint Ramalinga went on a pilgrimage to all the religious centres of Tamil Nadu before he went to Vadaloor and settled there. He had composed many songs about the sacred centres he went to. We come to know that he had gone on foot, not alone, or only once, but many times, accompanied by a band of his devotees. Once, while travelling, he informed one of his well-wishers that his letter was written from Thirunavaloor, on the northern bank of Coleroon, and that there were 20 people with him. It is evident from this that he went on pilgrimage in company with his disciples. It is not known that he visited pilgrim centres in the North, but we only know that he was eager to go to many of those places. There are indications to this effect in his letters to his friends.

Wearing Rags!

Saint Ramalinga gave up idol-worship completely, when he achieved spiritual maturity. But at the time he was engaged in it, he was like Saint Kannappa who worshipped the Lord of Kalahasthi. While visiting Padi, which is also called Thiruvalithayam, in his pilgrimage, he was pained to notice that the temple's "Sivalinga" was draped in a dirty cloth. He sang:

"Oh Shiva! Thou wealth of my mind!
My Lord! God who mastered me!

My Father! The Lord of Thiruvalithaya(m)
Is there reason any
That Thou shouldet wear this rag?"

"Is there none in this world who can venture
To remove this rag and put on a new one?"

"Alas! What shall I do?
Without a cloth Thou stood
In rags like a beggar."

"Scanty is this rag that when worn
The stony heart melts."

During this time, his mother Chinnammai breathed her last. On hearing of his mother's death, he was deeply distressed, for she had brought him up with so much filial care, affection and attention. Did not Saint Pattinathar who renounced the whole world as a mirage, also make intensely tearful, but ever living poetic literature as a result of the loss of his mother!

The Glimpse at "Thillai"

On learning that his brother, Parasurama Pillai, was emaciated in body, because of disease, Saint Ramalinga undertook the responsibility of taking him to the sacred seat of Chidambaram, to enable him to have a glimpse of the Cosmic Dance of Lord Nataraja so that he might be cured of his malady. Enroute to Chidambaram, he stayed for a few days in Pondicherry, as desired by some of his admirers. Having learnt of his arrival, many scholars and dignitaries received from him the benefit of his moral advice. Then he left for Chidambaram where he worshipped Lord Nataraja with his brother and composed many devotional lyrics.

Brother's Death!

Saint Ramalinga stayed in Chidambaram for some time, and then started again on his pilgrimage, after which he returned to Karunguzhi where his brother, Parasurama Pillai was staying. Soon after, his brother died, and in order to forget his sorrow, he wished to leave Karunguzhi. An admirer by the name of Venkata Reddiar

made an earnest plea that he stay in his residence. Accordingly, he stayed at his house.

During this time, his brother Sabapathy Pillai who showed a keen filial love in bringing him up and in educating him, died in Madras. Though he was a sage who had renounced everything, the loss of his brother saddened him, owing to his gratitude to him. He observed the vow of silence for some days. His primal affections could not be belied!

Sojourn at Cuddalore

Saint Ramalinga stayed in Karunguzhi for a long time. The small room at Venkata Reddiar's house where he stayed and composed innumerable lyrics is considered even today a sacred place. We come to know from the accounts of devotees, that Saint Ramalinga performed a number of miracles, while he was at Karunguzhi, and also, when on pilgrimage. We shall examine this elsewhere from the point of view of research and come out in detail with our views.

Saint Ramalinga then stayed in Cuddalore for a few days in response to the invitation of Appaswamy Chettiar. During his stay at Cuddalore, he gave discourses every day at night and endeavoured to reform peoples' lives. He carried on a debate with the members of the Brahmah Samaj who hated idol-worship.

After the death of his father, mother, and brothers, he felt at heart that "all was over". As far as he was concerned, he was a white-robed-ascetic! The only place of sanctuary for him was the sacred feet of Lord Nataraja. He desired to reach them only through service to all living beings. As he considered the city environment as not conducive to service, he decided to choose a small and humble hamlet, stay there and commence his service for a new society of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood.

V

RESIDENCE AT VADALOOR

It is natural for holy men of the righteous path to shun ostentatious living. That is why they do not like city life. All the world knows that Gandhiji stayed in an *ashram* he established in a rural area. Though he happened to stay in the city of Delhi, for attending to the affairs of politics, he preferred more to stay in the Bangi colony where the people of the depressed class lived, than in the "Birla Mansion" of the magnate, Birla.

Saint Ramalinga who was the fore-runner to the Ascetic of Wardha in finding the path of righteous living, was deeply disturbed by the hollowness of city life, even during his boyhood days in Madras. We know of this from his lines:

"Oh, Lord! Never was I keen
On staring leisurely at
The appearance, gait and mien
Of others in the world
If I do, I would be very much scared."

Yes! He hated the very city which was described as "the most charitable", for its way of life. During his sojourn in Madras, he generally preferred to stay and spend his time in villages in the neighbourhood. He revealed his dislike for city-life in these lines:

"Fearing in my heart the afflictions I would experience
If I remained in greedy Chennai,
I approached small villages in the country side.
My Father! Thou alone know the pains I suffered,
While roaming through woods, pebbled paths and moors,
Pains that cannot be expressed in words."

Because the shrine of Lord Nataraja was in Chidambaram, he was fascinated by Chidambaram. In this respect he may be compared to Nandanar. However, the divine atmosphere found during the time of Nandanar was not to be found in Chidambaram at the time of Saint Ramalinga. Therefore he disliked living in Chidambaram.

In a letter to his friend, Thiru Rathina Mudaliar, written on 20-3-1961, he stated:

"In the present time, Chidambaram is fit only for a couple of days" stay for worshipping our dear Lord Nataraja, as this is a scene of decadent times." (B.K. Pillai, V.5, p.40)

As his dislike for city life increased, he started devoting his thoughts to the task of choosing a hamlet for his stay. Many who were devoted to him, requested that he stay in their respective villages. After deep thought, he chose a village called Vadaloor which was also known by another name, Parvathipuram. Even today, the village looks an arid place. During his time, it must have been like a real desert! However, as Saint Ramalinga was born solely to reform those of the world, who look seeingly fair from outside, but who are all black from within, he aspired to transform even a desert into an oasis.

The choice of Vadaloor

Vadaloor forms part of a big tract of land, amidst such religious centres as Thirukoodalaiyatoor, Thirumuthukunram, Thiruvathihai, Thiruvarumbaimakalam, Thirupathiripuliyoor, and Thiagavalli, and enclosed on all four sides by rivers like the *Thenpannai*, *Thirukadilam Vellaru*, and *Manimutharu*. The four temple towers of Lord Nataraja could be seen from there. Saint Ramalinga chose Vadaloor which was devoid of any comforts of life, particularly because of this sacred aspect.

It is not known as to where exectly he settled in Vadaloor. However, as it is certain that he established a *House of Truth and Charity* in the year 1867, we may conjecture that he must have gone to Vadaloor a year before.

The New Code

The body and mind of Saint Ramalinga assumed an intrinsic dimension, before he went to Vadaloor. He brought about a great change in him, both from with in and without. Just as Gandhiji gave the profound code, *Sathyagraha* to the world, Saint Ramalinga, had founded the philosophy of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood. His mouth uttered the sacred slogan:

"Hail! Supreme Light Divine!
Hail! Supreme Love Divine!"

and had begun preaching the three great gospels? to the disciples around him:

" Remain hungry,
Remain alone,
Remain awake."

Saint Ramalinga's songs of divine grace were divided into six canons. We have already seen that the first four canons were published in the year 1867, when he established a *House of Truth and Charity* in Vadaloor.

Storm and Stifled Air!

A white-robed ascetic had appeared among people who considered that only those who wore saffron robes were ascetics! They were amazed that the white-robed ascetic exhibited a purity of heart, an ethical conduct and lofty qualities. Saint Ramalinga's residence at Vadaloor was to effect a great change in his life. He was to fight the stifled air of communal fanaticism, to counter which a storm of socio-religious revolution was to rise from his heart.

Let us endeavour to know something in detail about Saint Ramalinga's traits and qualities before we are introduced to these

great changes. Only then we can well know him who stood amidst the suffocating air of communal fanaticism.

Dislike of Money

Saint Ramalinga was not fond of money. A few rich men loved him and approached him often. But he never received any help purely for himself. According to the tenets of *Puranaanooru*, this white-robed ascetic "ate little, and wore little". What he needed were two white dresses, a pair of footwear, and a handful of food. During his end-days he would eat only occasionally. He was so stout-hearted that he "was not obliged to anyone, nor would he fear death". He was determined that "there was nothing to fear, and there was not also anything to cause fear". If the king was chaff to the ascetic, then what is a man of wealth to him?

Money Cast into the Well!

We understand that for his small needs, he chose one or two true devotees and received help only from them. When they offered him money beyond his needs, he would throw the excess money into a well or a lake. Of this, he himself talks in these poems:

"Oh, Mother mine! Desire for money I have none.
Many a time I have thrown it
Into the well, the pond and the tank.
Never shall I throw away
What thou hath endowed me with love.
I give them to others.
What more shall I say,
Having seen Thy Grace which
Grants everything in a trice!"

"Oh, Father! Giver of Divine Grace!
Thou knoweth the pain I suffered
Whenever the Loving volunteered material help.
My Father! Thy Sacred Heart knows,
Wearied at heart, I threw away
The illusory wealth into the gutter,

As I trembled at the misfortune
It would bring."

Thiru. Rathina Mudaliar of Irukkam was devoted to Saint Ramalinga right from his youthhood. He was not a rich man. He served in some office in Madras, and eked out a living from a meagre income. Saint Ramalinga used to seek only his help for his small needs. Let us see in this regard some parts of his letters which he wrote to Irukkam Rathina Mudaliar, after his sojourn in Vadaloor.

"If one or two 'pieces' of *long cloth* could be bought and sent through someone who comes here, the cost could be reimbursed later on, but no trouble need be taken for this."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p.34.)

"The piece of *long cloth*, sent without minding the trouble, I deem to be measureless! This will do. Please do not take any more pains. We shall see later on. Please do not take any further efforts on my behalf, excepting this."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p.35.)

"I received without delay your registered letter and the 25 rupees enclosed within. I had caused you to take special efforts in this regard as I am certain that this transpired by the 'Grace of Shiva' and that it would give us immense satisfaction and great joy, I did not fight shy of asking you for this. But I am concerned that you had to take special efforts and trouble yourself for this. To put it briefly, in view of the old and intimate friendship between us, I had indicated to you what I would not care to mention elsewhere, even in my dream. As this will please my Lord, so I pray, this pleases you. Please let me know where and by what means you got it."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: pp.36-37.)

"I have received the pair of footwear sent through Dharmalingam Pillai." (B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p.51.)

Determination

It is evident from the sections of Saint Ramalinga's letters, quoted above, that what he sought from others were only clothing and footwear; that he obtained them from one or two true devotees; and that

he only borrowed them, with a view to reimbursing the expenses towards those items he had asked for. Many in abject poverty among the poor used to press Saint Ramalinga to receive financial help on their behalf from rich people who were devoted to him. He consoled his nephew and pupil, mythologist Sundaram Pillai, with this poem, when he pressed him to put an end to his poverty.

"Dear one! Stay there contentedly,
Seeing the Golden Hall, the House of Wisdom
And the Cosmic Dance of our beautiful Lord.
Within twenty days, I will also reach Thillai
Where green trees flourish.
Our miseries will be less. We shall entreat
The Lord to alleviate them. Do not despair."

When Kandaswamy Mudaliar, caught in unbearable poverty, requested Saint Ramalinga to give him a note to some rich man known to him for financial aid, he revealed his strength of mind, with a poem thus:

"Entreat I will not the help of aliens.
Even if I am to be cut to pieces,
I will not go elsewhere,
Even if I am forced to entreat,
Go will I to my Lord.
This I will establish by words and verses."

Succour to the Helpless

Saint Ramalinga was an embodiment of love. Was not his ceaseless utterance, "Infinite Love", his Gospel? He could not bring himself to beg from the rich in order to help the suffering poor. However, as though there was an exception to everything, he sought help from Irukkam Rathina Mudaliar for a few poor people who deserved his compassion. Let us see parts of his letters in this respect:

"Please take a loan of two sovereigns from the place where you usually borrow and give them to the lady who brings you this letter. The inconvenience caused in this regard will soon be compensated for by God! This is certain."

"As the person who brings you this letter is ill and at the same time, as those who usually lend me money are not near by, I have to inconvenience you by sending him over to you for reasons of health."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: pp.36-37.)

Saint Ramalinga ardently believed that every one among his countrymen should receive education through books. He also greatly desired that equal to men, women also should have inculcation of learning. Poor boys who came to him for financial help for their education, were directed to meet Irukkam Rathina Mudaliar. Here are parts of his letters he wrote to Thiru. Mudaliar in this regard:

"Namasivaya Pillai comes there for his education. Please attend, as often, to matters pertaining to his education."

"Kumaraswamy Pillai who brings you this letter is desirous of learning. Please give him the appropriate education."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: pp.28-29.)

Saint Ramalinga averred that the Government should take the entire responsibility of the education of the poor. He did not like education being under private management, as Hindu society was rife with communal discriminations and religious fanaticism. The following letter he wrote to his friend Rathina Mudaliar is proof of his views: "The Pachaiyappa's School in Chidambaram appears to lack discipline now. However it will be good if the Government were to deal with its administration. On the contrary, it is connected with some Hindus who are not united."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p.40.)

The present policy of the Central Government that the welfare of society at large should be entirely taken care of by Government Departments, was held even then by Saint Ramalinga.

Saint Ramalinga shunned the rich who were proud of their wealth. Even if they volunteered to help, he declined to accept such help. When a richman, Thiru. Somu Chettiar, behaved in a manner that hurt him, he wrote as follows to Thiru. Rathina Mudaliar:

"I will not ever write to Thiru. Somu Chettiar. You know he wrote a letter with respect to his marriage, and my reply to it as a

test of his affection. We can, in half an hour get to know thousand rich men like him. To us, they appear to be of no importance. We do not want their attention. We are ruled by Lord Shiva. We shall not lack in any respect. This is the truth."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p.53.)

Some rich men who were greatly devoted to him waited at his beck and call to shower him over with all the riches. Because he was not in needs, and because of his habit of seeking help only from appropriate quarters, he declined to receive help which these rich men volunteered to offer. To know of this, let us read the letter he wrote to Thiru. Velu Mudaliar of Pondicherry, the owner of the Royal Hotel in Madras, on 15-2-1859.

"Sir! I have always considered this mortal coil and the bits and morsels we feed it with as a big burden. Alas! I continue to mortify mysef every day to get rid of it. What can money do to such a dog like me!

Please do not take any efforts with respect to financial matters or seek any other opportunities for your spending on my behalf.

It was through the letter you wrote to that good man, Thiru Srinivasa Mudaliar, that he asked me and I had to decline. Then you again wrote. In order not to hurt your feelings, I received rupees ten from Thiru. Mudaliar. The rest is with him. I wish to let you know this, Thiru. Srinivasa Mudaliar is a good man and a good friend and a knowledgeable person."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p.79.)

It is evident from this letter that though hotel owner Velu Mudaliar came forward to help Saint Ramalinga with money, through a friend, he declined it first, and later, on being compelled in writing by Velu Mudaliar, he for the sake of good feelings, reluctantly accepted just ten rupees from him. Contrary to this quality, what he expresses in the lines in "*Ramanama Thirupathigam*", in *The Songs of Divine Grace*, is his taking upon himself in a kindly vein the defects of others by the world:

"Oh, My Lord!
Forgetting Thy Holy Feet

I am wasting my time at the doors
Of the wealthy for subsistence!
Alas! What shall this poorman do?"

Ascetics apart, householders also should not desire money. To wish for money beyond one's needs, or to care for money too much is the root of many evils. To hanker for money beyond one's daily needs is one of the many crimes of man. Bharati said in *Gnanaratham*: "An incurable disease has caught mankind. It is an unmitigating course, a perennial poison. Its name is lucre." He who loves darkness cannot be a recipient of the light of divine grace.

Jesus Christ also says the same: "It may be possible to push a camel through the ear of a needle, but it is not possible to send the wealthy to Heaven!"

Though Saint Ramalinga was an ascetic who renounced the pleasures of the world and solely sought the Grace of the Lord, he mixed with people according to worldly ways. No reformist can live without contact with the people. Those who live without such contacts may preach a lot, but they cannot achieve anything. The condition of those recluses who ever wish to remain in self-absorbed silence and solitude is different. But Saint Ramalinga was one who set himself up to present to the people many valuable and forward looking ideals. Therefore he was obliged to act as the leader of the people, participating in the pains and pleasures of those disciples who followed him, out of devotion to him.

Friend of the Devoted

When the close devotee, Rathina Mudaliar, became the father of the first child, Saint Ramalinga wrote to him: "I am overjoyed to know that you have been blessed with a child. Tend the child well, and be careful in everything."

And when he learnt that the same friend fell ill, he wrote:

"From the time you informed me by post that you were laid up with a cough, I am always thinking of you. I do not sleep. I am not able to concentrate in whatever I do, and I am deeply disturbed.

Take a paliative and rest with care. Do not take strong medicines. If work is a hindrance, leave it, and attend to your health. After you get well, you can earn a job by the Grace of Lord Shiva. You can even borrow and carry on your living until then.

You must strongly believe that no danger will occur to those who think of Lord Shiva and utter his name."

Here is a part of the letter, written on 11-6-1866, to Rathina Mudaliar, requesting help through a loan to an expounder of mythologies in straightened circumstances:

"Please pay this gentleman who meets you with this letter, four rupees per month for four months, by borrowing from the usual places. You know, if he has all the money with him, he will spend it."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p. 64.)

Protector of the deprived

Here is a letter of Saint Ramalinga, comforting a friend in debts:

"I wish you to be my friend even in the next birth. I can not think otherwise. By God's Grace, both you and our Selvaroya Mudaliar will be relieved of debts. Without being distressed, devote your thoughts, to Lord Shiva and let you ever be kind to living beings."

Like the sages of yore, Saint Ramalinga knew the art of medicine. Owing to this, poor people in ill - health used to surrender to this saint-saviour for getting themselves cured. Man of immense mercy as he was, he undertook the responsibility of protecting them, by tending them medically and giving them food. He once wrote to a friend about a situation in which he was placed:

"Here are two sick and helpless men who have sought me inevitably. After they get somewhat well, I propose to go over there, I do not know the will of Lord Shiva!"

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p. 56.)

"A great work of ours, formulated in two years, with the help of a number of equipments, in order to help the poor, is in disrepair,

owing to carelessness. Even though this was spoiled, I consoled myself that it was according to will of our Lord. However I am saddened when I think of the poor, afflicted with disease."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p.51.)

Benefaction

Saint Ramalinga served the poor whenever they were harassed by the heartless, and those in despair, by being their selfless support. Here are some parts of a letter he wrote to a friend in such a situation:

"I am deeply distressed to learn of what you have written in your letter, I have not recovered but I must. Yet, I am constantly praying to God that you should get well and that I should see you. Also, I am very eager to see you. At a time, when I long to see you and walk towards you, an immense constraint prevents me from doing so. I shall inform you of that."

"Ramakrishna Reddiar, presently the master of the house at which I eat, suffers from tropical dysentery. If I leave at this time, the world will criticise me and God also won't approve of it. I shall not stay on, even if he gets a little well. I do not know what is God's will."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p.82.)

Owing to a great mishap in Governmental affairs, two Brahmins in Parvthipuram have been caught and taken away. After receiving a letter in which they had written in distress that they would die, if I did not help, I had to postpone my travel to your place. As I am bound by mercy to help them, soon, in their matter, my mind vascillates without resolve between going to your place and to their's. I shall come, once my mind is settled a little bit."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p.88.)

VI

A MAN OF SIMPLE APPEARANCE

What was the appearance of Saint Ramalinga like, when he left Cuddalore for Vadaloor? Let us hear what his principal disciple, Thozhuvoor Mudaliar, says in this regard:

"He was of medium height, and lean of frame. The bones were visible. But he had great strength, and an upright bearing. He was moderately fair and had a clear complexion. He had a long nose, and big and sparkling eyes. His face always reflected a touch of sadness."

In the last days of his life, he grew long hair. He wore foot wear (a pair of Arcot slippers) - a habit alien to ascetics.

Except for a pair of white robes, he wore nothing else. It is also said he wore a single robe." (*The Great Book of the Songs of Divine Grace.*)

From the picture Thiru. Mudaliar presents, we come to know that he wore a two-piece dress, to begin with, and later on, he wore a single long piece of a white cloth, half of which he wound round the lower part of his body, and he covered both his head and the upper part, with the other half. From an earlier letter of his to Thiru. Rathina Mudaliar, we know that the white fabric was a mull-cloth, known as "Long Cloth", which was popular in those days.

On a few occasions, when Saint Ramalinga was young, his friends liked to drape him in silk. Let us hear him in one of his own songs, on such occasions, about his disturbed inner feelings:

"Those who knew my discomfiture, whenever friends draped me in fine silk robes, felt uncomfortable."

It is customary for ascetics to wear only saffron robes. Contrary to this, Saint Ramalinga was a white-robed ascetic.

As Saint Ramalinga desired reform in religion, we may say, he did not wish to wear saffron robes. Also, he felt that only those who are hard-hearted and have not attained grace need to wear saffron robes, as a sign for acquiring it, and for those who have attained the discipline of grace, mere white-robes would do. He himself expresses as follows:

"The hard-hearted who have not attained grace, because of their particular attachment to the triple desires of life, should wear saffron robes. Those, free from these blemishes, need not wear them. It is reasonable for ascetics to wear saffron robes; the 'graceless' and the hard-hearted are full of the mundane desires of life. The saffron robe represents their struggle to conquer these desires and attain grace. After the triumph comes grace, which is symbolised by white."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p 22.)

As Saint Ramalinga had imbibed such great qualities as grace, compassion, and wisdom at his birth itself, he did not require saffron robes to be an ascetic. But he respected genuine saffron-robed-ascetics. He detested false ones in saffron robe. Also, he warned his followers not to be deceived by them. In a letter to Irukkam Rathina Mudaliar, written on 19-4-1866, Saint Ramalinga refers to a spurious ascetic as follows:

"An ascetic called Naicker is the foremost of the upstart ascetics found in the present day world. How? Without knowing what should be known, and following his own crazy volitions, he has styled himself an eccentric *Sanyasin*. Therefore spot the true ascetic. Be ever watchful."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p. 63.)

As though advising his mind, apart from advising others, he sings:

"Do not mix with those who appear
to be sincere outside but vile inside."

Sage Valluvar, who gave the Divine Testament, also warns the people by speaking about the meanness of false ascetics thus:

"Vilest is he who seems a saint
Cheating the world without restraint."

It is religiously customary that those who follow the divine path usually approach, a proper teacher and receive divine knowledge from him. Saint Ramalinga received no such inculcation from any one, either because he wished that all religious differences should go, or possibly for some other reason. In his childhood days, when he was standing and crying in a corner of the sanctorum of the temple of Lord Nataraja in Chidambaram, he had sung:

"Thinking of the words of grace that Thou uttered with a smiling face,
Because of the penance I did of yore,
When a small lad I was, I stood at Thy shrine at Thillai,
In a corner, weary and weeping, wishing for Thy grace.

"Oh, Gracious Lord Supreme!
Thou who bestowed the power of true wisdom
To the lad who was playing in the streets."

On a later date, he refers, as in these, to God's volunteering to inculcate divine knowledge in him: Indeed! As the Lord came on His own and overmastered him, he did not require inculcation. Because his songs were sung by one who was untaught, orthodox Saivites called his *Songs of Revelation*, "*Songs of Illusion*". While exhorting his own mind, Saint Ramalinga sings:

"Knowing well that this body will be given
unto dust and flames, fine silk thou hasten to wear.
Even when told, "Oh thou divest the loin-cord, in ignorance, thou long to wear jewellery.
Even when told, "Cast off the ear rings, thou go on with the meaningless act."

Mastering his own mind, rejecting worldly possessions, wearing a single piece of a cloth to cover the lower and upper part of his body, Saint Ramalinga went about in our land. With him the word and the deed were the same, without a sorry dichotomy between the two.

We see today some of our monastic heads decked in silk and gold, going about in ceremonial palanquins. Between Saint Ramalinga and these "ascetics", there is a big distance. Saint Ramalinga 'covers his body fully with white cloth, and appears with folded arms. What is the reason for this? He himself answers, as here:

"I walked with folded arms,
Shy of swinging them.
Alas! I covered my body with white robes,
Embarrassed to show it."

Walking with arms swinging reflets the pride of youth. Embodiment of humility that Saint Ramalinga was, he eschewed it. Besides, he perhaps thought, that covering his handsome body would help him preserve his purity!

A woman who is pure is described as chaste. Saint Ramalinga too was chaste. That is, he deemed the Divine Dancer his consort! He covered his whole body so as his purity would not be jeopardized. A chastity of an intense order which prevents a woman from attracting others' attention, not only applies to her, but also to men. If a man can covet a woman, similarly, a woman too can covet a mani says Ramalinga. From his experiences of being caught by women who are fond of men, he fully covered his body. This he reveals in a tearful appeal to God.

"At the city, beautiful damsels
Took hold of my hands perforce,
When I was alone, spoke endearments,
Made overtures, many a time,
Swore falsities, fell on me,
and offered riches.
Yet I did not yield, I trembled.
Thou knoweth I never chided them."

It is said some beautiful and libidinous women made many an embarrassing sexual advance to Saint Ramalinga. They offered him riches and they also threatened to kill themselves if he did not yield to their desires. Despite all this, there was no confrontation, he says. Kindly hearted as he was, he not only escaped from such women, but he also did not speak of them harshly. Because of this experience, he exclaims:

"Alas! I covered my body with white robes.
Embarrassed to show it."

There must be a 'male-chastity,' not only for ascetics, but also for house-holders. That is why Bharati sang:

" Chastity must be made applicable to women
and men as well."

Saint Ramalinga was so 'chaste' as to reject even his wife! Cannot the ascetics of today atleast observe at the individual level the chastity of the male,' namely, "one woman for one man?"

There is also another instance of Saint Ramalinga's renunciation of worldly possessions for protecting himself from the mundane life. When Sabapathy Mudaliar, an admirer of Saint Ramalinga pressed him to attend a wedding at his residence, he wrote thus, as though he was addressing his own heart:

"How could I go, my heart?
I have neither a shawl, nor a white shirt, nor a good dhothi to wear,
I have no work to do
I have no money
I am not able-bodied.
I have no house to live in
I am not important
I am not inclined to attend the wedding."

The adage, "Do not go where your company is not desired", applies to ascetics also!

Though he was connected with those who were householders, in order to bring about revolutionary changes in the socio-religious realm, he did not intimately mix with them. He moved with them "as with fire, not coming close, nor going far." That is the trait of an ascetic. "Whatever he does or what ever his difficulty, an ascetic's mind is bent on achieving quietitude." Thus Saint Ramalinga had this sagacious utterance as his principle of life. May those ascetics, who are involved in public service and are connected with householders, have Saint Ramalinga as their guide.

Saint Ramalinga, by the power of his penance, had attained what is called *pranavathe* - a body of light. He never permitted anyone to photograph him, or make a statue of him. Some admirers attempted to photograph him. What a wonder! Despite many attempts, it is said, his sacred body could not be photographed! Was this a miracle performed by him? Or was this because of his novel physique? A maker of clay works from Panrutti, out of devotion to Saint Ramalinga, made a colourful image after him, and showed it to him. Alas! The artisan expected his approbation! But the Saint received it, and let it slip from his hands, saying "This golden exterior will become dust unto dust!" The clay image broke to pieces!

Saint Ramalinga exhorted householders not to lead an ostentatious life. He poked fun at people being mad after gold, as follows:

"He who let us come with two big openings in the ear, if only He had so desired, would he not have provided similar holes in the nose and the ear for men and women to wear ornaments for the ear and nose. If they could enquire into this and learn, would they cons ent to wear such ornaments for the ear and the nose?

(B.K. Pillai, V. pp.138-39).

Those who are genuinely devoted to God would consider it a sin to bedeck themselves with jewellery. A humble life reflects a love of God.

Saint Ilango who uttered,

"Realize God", also said, "Revere those who have realized God"! Saint Ramalinga searched for true seers who have realized God, and he wished to serve them. The following song reveals his attitude:

"Those, with hatred for none,
And love for others as for themselves,
Rejoice from within, the fraternal unity.
Their hearts, I realised, are the abode
Where dances my Lord,
In the form of purest knowledge.
My mind longs intensely
To serve those great seers."

He who does not observe distinctions of caste and creed and also other differences; he who loves all other lives as he loves his; he who desires a spiritual unity from his heart, not from his lips, is a noble person, and Gods resides in his beautiful heart. And it is such seers, Saint Ramalinga declares, he would like to serve.

The wise seer that Saint Ramalinga searched for lived in the north east of Calcutta, during his very life time. He was Saint Ramakrishna. Gandhiji who appeared after Saint Ramalinga, was a pure hearted and peerless seer, remembered the world over. Does not Bharati, praise him for this reason thus?

"Great Soul! Thou resolved to entwine
This war-weary, bloody, unfair politics
With the conviction of true knowledge of
Showing compassion even to those
Who mean to harm one's self and
Realising that all human beings are
The children of God and divine emanations."

Both Saint Ramakrishna and Gandhiji were also white-robed ascetics like Saint Ramalinga.

Saint Ramalinga showed the same humility in all aspects of life as in dress. He revealed his humility in his talk, walk and while standing or sitting. The life of Saint Ramalinga was an elucidation of the verse of the *Kural*:

"Self-rule leads to realms of Gods
Indulgence leads to gloomy Hades."

Even fattening of the body, he dislikes, as in these verses:

"Thou knoweth that I never wished
This decaying fleshly body to grow fat.
Need I to say that even today
I wish that it be made lean."

Even his lean frame, he covered with the white cloth and was averse to sitting on a high-seat. We know of this from his utterance:

"I am scared to sit on a high seat, or
cross my legs."

As he considered all souls as aspects of the Divine he was afraid that if he sat on a high seat, he would disrespect those souls, seated below him and that he would be guilty of the sin of sacrilege. Saint Thayumanava also alludes to the self same significance when he says:

"As you manifest yourself in the flowers
I see, I have no heart to pluck
this fresh flower."

The Giver of the *Songs of Grace* considered himself only as a humble being. He did not think that he was superior to other human beings, or for that matter, to other kinds of lives. He respected all lives created by the Divine Spirit as equal. His new watch-words "Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood", sprang from this noble trait. But the concourse of disciples round him looked upon him as God and worshipped him. Those disciples who received inculcation in the path of righteousness from him were also no exception to this. Pained by this he sang:

"Brothers of the Order of the Righteous Path!
Kindly hear what this humble servant,
With obeisance to your feet, hath to say.
Think of me as one among you in search of God.
Adore our Lord Almighty alone
Indulge not in eulogy and false talk

Like those of the decadent path.
The Lord Infinite of perfect splendour,
All embracing, pure bliss, is the only God.
Learn this in this life itself, adhering to Him.
This I swear on myself and my Lord."

and advised them to desist from adulating him, but to worship God and receive immortality. He utterly disliked the superstition of men being worshipped as God. On this, he states in his *Great Sermon*:

"Without being aware of God, these people run round me, considering me God! Alas! My brotheren run round me only because they have not become aware of God! I am ever distressed, both with in and without."

All those who have a human-body do not imbibe human qualities. Those who have acquired human qualities alone are human beings. Only they are fit to receive divine grace from God. An ascetic who once glimpsed upon Saint Ramalinga, exclaimed "There goes a great man! The story pertaining to this incident is as follows:

"Our Saint was always accustomed to going to Tiruvotriyoor via a short lane, instead of by the main street. One day, contrary to his practice, he took the main street. A naked ascetic, seated in a verandah, whose habit was to describe passers - by as assess and cattles, saw our Saint going by. Immediately he exclaimed unusually and heartily, "Here goes a noble man". He also covered himself with his hands. On hearing him, our Saint approached him and gave him a a few pieces of advice. The ascetic left the spot the same night!"

This incident is described in the history of the Saint published by the Madras Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sangham!

Saint Ramalinga's life was suffused with human qualities, both from within and without. It is only later, he was able to be an all-powerful ascetic. Let us now follow him to Vadaloor and observe his life there.

VII

THE HOUSE OF TRUTH AND CHARITY

Saint Ramalinga, the embodiment of Divine Love in the form of man, after his arrival into Vadaloor from Cuddalore, with his band of disciples, stayed there permanently, to begin the new task and the new sacred service of founding a society of righteous path, free from the differences of caste and creed.

In those days — that is 95 years ago — the whole of India was ruled by the British. The mercyless rule of the foreigners robbed the land and starved the people. Everywhere in India there were famine, hunger, disease and death! The Government refused to alleviate the distresses of the people!

The fanatic communal and religious groups, enjoying a good life in the country, and the foreign rule besides, did not help the people in distress. Because of the tyranny of the upper caste, the people of the lower caste suffered helplessly. The orthodox sect which was at the top of society, cited orthodoxy and said that their fate alone was responsible for the hunger of the people. The state of poverty in the land saddened Saint Ramalinga. Velayudha Mudaliar, while describing the apperance of the Saint, spoke of the touch of sadness always in his face. This was because of his sorrow for the poverty-stricken.

The Saint who wished to see a new society of righteous path, realized that the first task for it was the removal of hunger. Therefore he planned toestablish a House of Truth and Charity in the Vadaloor

region for daily feeding of the poor. The people of Vadaloor offered him 150 acres of land for this purpose. Some others donated money and building materials. On 22.5.1867, the building for the *House of Truth and Charity* was inaugurated and the task of feeding the poor was begun to mark the commencement of the service for the realization of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood.

Saint Ramalinga can be described of the *Manimegalai* of the 19th century, who came to appease the hunger of the poor. The *House of Truth and Charity* served as a cornucopia for him. In this regard, he drove home a truth not only to heads of religion and monastic institutions of today but also to politicians and bureaucrats; that is, if peoples' moral character should develop, if national and international integration should flourish, first of all they should be freed from the affliction of hunger; that is the only way for the establishment of world peace. That is why Saint Ramalinga emphasized on spiritual love and unity for the whole universe, and involved himself first in the task of removing hunger.

'Hunger' is not a disease of the body; it is an affliction of the soul. That is why a poet Koolavaniga Chatthanar sang: "Those who offer food offer life". Indeed it is fair to describe Saint Ramalinga more as a giver of life than as a giver of food to the poor! Therefore, we hall hereafter call him *Ramalinga, the Bounteous*: *Ramalinga Vallalar*.

Whenever Ramalinga Vallalar witnessed lives in distress, he also suffered in pain. The very lines of the Saint will emphasize this:

"I shall not bear for a single moment
To see and to hear even to the smallest extent
The sufferings that living beings undergo on this earth."

According to the adage "When hunger comes, the basic human characteristics go!" Therefore, the more the prevalence of hunger, the greater the destruction of human traits in India! Patriotism, Piety and Love of Religion declined day by day. Evils like condemnation of God, embracing another religion, supporting foreign rule, lack of love for our own land, were rife.

Chiefs of monastic houses, religious heads, and sectarian leaders of those days did not either understand this truth or even if they did, were oblivious to it. This was the fate of the Tamil country in the 19th century. Vallalar endeavoured to set aright this fate.

Ramalinga Vallalar wished that a grand economic revolution should occur in human society. Poet Kambar,; visualized a society of equal justice, without the rich and the poor. As though he found such a society in the Kosala Land, he exclaims, "There are no givers, as there are no seekers", and also, "As all have enormous riches, there are neither 'haves' nor 'have-nots'! It is on this basis that Vallalar also desired to see a new world. As a first task for this, he engaged himself in the service of removing the hunger of the poor by starting the House for Truth and Charity, in Vadaloor. In the slogan, "Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood" that the Saint gave, the distinctions of caste and creed, and the disparities of the rich and the poor, we should believe, have both been anulled. In these lines:

"Oh, Divine Giver! The rich eat
While the poor suffer in hunger and
intense sorrow at heart,

I can not bear this.
Whenever I think of it,
I feel pained in body and soul.
What shall I do? Alas!
I can not eat or remain at peace.
My Mother! Thou should rectify these disparities,"

he reminds us of the division of the 'haves' and 'have nots', the rich and the poor, and points out how the poor suffer in hunger owing to this class-distinction. He sings that, free from these evils, "the equal, the high and the low - all mankind should conduct worldly life in harmony."

The Hindu religion, or any other religion, did not accept the phenomenal rise in the number of poor people. Even traditional heads

of religion did not connect the differences of 'rich' and 'poor' with 'sin' and 'salvation'. If they had done so, it would have been against the ethical code of conduct of the Tamils and against Vallalar's preaching of the righteous path, for blessing poverty is an insult to God.

To say that a man's eating of his food, at his house or begging for it from door to door, is according to the result of 'sin' and salvation, may be in the spirit of orthodox religion. This, injustice is not supported by the Saivite, Vaishnavite, Jain and Buddistic scriptures.

Would Saint Appar, who sang thus, "Lord! your duty is to protect even a humble fellow like me. My duty to serve all lives," grant that poverty is the symbol of sin"?

The *Kural* of Sage Valluvar, does not praise poverty. It curses both God and King if they have been responsible for it!

"Let World-Maker loiter and rot
If 'beg and live' be human fate."

Saint Ilango, who came after Valluvar, praises the land of the Cholas as one that was free from hunger and disease, in these lines:

"May the king of the land and all this vast kingdom
Not be troubled by hunger or enmity
But enjoy seasonal rains and prosperity."

(*Silambu*-5, 71-3.)

Poet Koolavaniga Chatthanar sings in *Manimekalai*:

"The scourge of hunger is such an evil
That it will destroy high birth and nobility,
Throw education to the winds,
Ruin one's modesty and beauty,
And drag families to the street.
My tongue will not cease to utter
The glory of those who end this evil."

(*Manimekalai* 11: 76-81)

"Those who offer food to all in this earth, offer life".

(*Manimekalai*. 11: 92-96)

These lines describe the terible condition of hunger. They stress the need for putting an end to it. Apart from explaining the ethical advantages accruing in favour of those who offer food, the poet-saint also blesses them.

Also, the utterance in *Manimekalai* (16: 134), "Let hunger die from the face of the earth", reveals the desire that hunger should be eradicated from the entire world.

The great poetess and queen of knowledge, Avvaiyar, reveals womankind's attitude to hunger in these lines: "Oh, king! Thou can not bear to see anyone going without food even once a day". Also, "Give alms! Follow the path of virtue".

Lofty Kamban, the maker of the great epic, the *Ramayana*, reveals by implication that there was no poverty in the Kosala Land, by saying, "There were no takers, so they were no givers!"

Saint Ramalinga's Goal

Even many centuries before the time of Ramalinga Vallalar, poverty was experienced in the Tamil Land. But the folly to encourage it was not there. During Vallalar's time, poverty was considered a curse received by society. There was a demeaning attitude that hunger was the prize for sin, that the hungry were the symbol of sin and also that they were sinners. Even those who offered food to the hungry-sinner were threatened that they had a share in the sin. The deeply disturbed Vallalar, on seeing that cruelty, declared: "Every time when I think of this, my body and soul are affected". It is under such a disturbing condition that Vallalar started the "House of Truth and Charity". It was his wish that the service begun at Vadaloor, should spread throughout the world. His goal was that, a hungry man, whoever he was, should be fully fed at all times, without being given a 'no'.

The Picture Depicted by Ramalinga Vallalar

India was enslaved by the British during the time of Ramalinga Vallalar. The enslaving (English Masters) were not disturbed by the

hunger of those thus enslaved. Though India was "in touch" with hunger, even before the Whiteman's arrival, the evil of hunger increased as a result of his calculated exploitation. Ramalinga Vallalar describes this period of utter cruelty in these poetic lines:

"Whenever I saw plants whithering,
My heart also whithered.
When I saw the poor, weary of starvation,
Begging from door to door, their hunger never alleviated,
My heart throbbed in agony.
When I came across people suffering from the unmitigated disease,
My heart grieved in pain.
When I met people, honest beyond comparison,
And worn out by poverty,
I was also anguished."

He pictures in this poem, the tired and empty-stomached poor, who could not get enough to eat even after begging from door to door. It is said, (watching this scene of deprivation), that the Saint became lean both in body and soul! As it was an ever continuing-hunger, he described it as an "unmitigated disease". Among seekers of alms, there might be sluggards who wished to eat at the expense of the other's labours. Saint Ramalinga does not point to such lazy people. He points to such people who, despit, their keen self-respect, have become poor, and are therefore jobless, though they are able to work. His heart went out in sympathy with such people. Yes. Ramalinga the 'Bounteous Hearted', with his tearful lyrics, makes all the tender-hearted to offer their sympathy to the House of Truth and Charity.

The Everburning Oven!

It is demeaning to beg from house to house. More deaming is the situation in which the poor weep inconsolably because none gives them food. Alas! The evil of poverty which Ramalinga Vallalar saw in enslaved India a century before, is not gone even in free India!

That is why, the task of giving free food, started a century ago by Ramalinga Vallalar has to be continued even today. It is said that the

oven, set up and lighted by him in 1867, for the task of giving free food continues burning even today without being put out. This is not a happy situation for us. Let us pray that there be prosperity all over the country and that poverty be eradicated from every home, so that the day when we can put out the fire in the oven lit by Vallalar in the house of Truth and Charity, is not far away!

Great poets like Valluvar, Ilango, Satthanar, Avvaiyar and Kambar condemned poverty, but they had not planned for the task of eradicating poverty, it seemed! As they lived in a free land, under a native govenment, they probably thought that the task of removing hunger was the king's duty! Vallalar, who lived as a slave-citizen, came forward to put an end to the hunger of the poor by receiving help from the rich. Yes! He tried to achieve in his own life-time what Gandhiji preached a generation later, namely, a liberal-socialism. The House of Charity which he established at Vadaloor was the encampment in his battle against hunger. The first ascetic to fight poverty was indeed Ramalinga Vallalar. All other ascetics lay dorment in monastic houses. Though they moved with people, on seeing the hungry, they spoke a glib philosophy that "all is the result of His deed; nothing moves without Him." According to them, hunger also was a 'divine gift' of the Lord.

Gandhiji's Views

If the orthodox priests are approached for an antidote, they would say: "Circle the Gods of the Nine Planets for nine days, the malefic influence of Saturn will go, and happiness will be born." The philosophers would preach that "the soul knows no hunger"! This is the condition of the men of religion, who lived in the 19th century Of these, Gandiji says:

"All the thoughts of the poor would be spent only on how to solve their difficulties. Spiritual preaching would not touch their heart The mind of people in acute hunger could not be drawn to other matters. They would not listen to whatever is said to them. But they would think of the one who gave them food as divine. Other thoughts would not enter the mind of the hungry."

(*Young India* 5.5.1927.)

"Talking philosophy to the poor is only wounding their feelings. If you do so, they would look upon you and me as inhuman

beings. Had they not known so far only a harsh and cruel God! They had seen only a terrible and angry God. What can we say to them about God? I have no courage to do so. When I see the lifeless eyes of those people, I have no heart to speak to them about God. Only food is their God."

"We who have had a sound breakfast, and are in a position to contemplate as to what we could have for lunch, can do research about God. What divine research can I do with people who suffer even without a single meal a day? Food and gruel are the embodiment of God for them".

(*Young India*, 15. 10. '31.)

The views that the Sage of Wardha expressed at a later point of time, were also the same that Ramalinga Vallalar, his guide, held. "The pain of hunger obtrudes the exposition of God and Soul", said Vallalar.

Compassion to Living Beings

Today, the concept of "compassion to living beings" is understood as eschewing non-vegetarian food, and consuming only vegetable matter. The "compassion" that Vallalar is concerned with is greater than this. He calls it "the discipline of kindness to living beings."

In 1867, on the great day the House of Truth and Charity was established in Vadaloor, Vallalar wrote in his own hand and read out to the people what he considered as the discipline of kindness to living beings. Here are some sections from his detailed explanation:

"It should be understood that the main aim of kindness to living beings is putting an end to the pain of hunger and destruction of lives."

"The fire of hunger burns from within the body of the poor. Quenching it with food is kindness to living beings."

"When the human body — the divine abode for expounding the nature of God — is on the point of being ravaged by hunger, offering food and safe-guarding those divine abodes is kindness to living beings."

"Offering food to the poor who cannot sleep in their pain of hunger, and removing their pain and making them sleep, is kindness to living beings."

"Those who observe penance, vows, prayers, meditation, yoga and divine precepts, without the discipline of kindness to living beings can not receive the Grace of God. We should not deem them to be spiritually mature. The deeds done without kindness to living beings, are deeds of futility and illusion."

"House-holders, when on special and happy occasions like marriages, etc. decorate their houses and celebrate with dance, music, processions and other ceremonies and grand observances, and offer sumptuous varieties of foods and savouries, do not care to see the faces of the hungry poor."

"Economizing as much as possible in our family expenses, we should remove *the hunger of the poor.*"

(*The Discipline of Kindness to Living Beings*)

Appeal for Financial Aid

With a view to fostering the growth of the movement for Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood, Ramalinga Vallalar, who never sought money from others, appealed to the Tamil people for money for the House of Truth and Charity, in the name of the Order of the Pure and Righteous Path. Here is a part of the appeal:

"The most important aim of kindness to living beings is that it should end the acute discomfiture of hunger, experienced by the helpless poor."

"To encourage the discipline of kindness to living beings, it is proposed to establish a House of Charity, agreeable to all religions. in Vadaloor, known as Parvathipuram, in the distrirct of Cuddalore. As it is to be done with the co-operation of all, we request the kind and good-hearted to contributed their mite, and proportionately share the profit that may accrue.

(B.K.Pillai, V. 5. p. 97.)

We should remember that the Order of the Universal, Scriptural and Righteous Path was started in 1865 itself, even before the Saint's

arrival at Vadaloor, and the House of Truth and Charity was commenced only on its behalf. Soon after the starting of the House of Truth and Charity, a scriptural school, called *Sanamarga Bhodini*, was also started for teaching scriptures to those who wished to become ascetics. We come to know that teaching was done there in Tamil, Sanskrit and English, and that the school was managed by such great scholars as Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar.

For the purpose of propagating the righteous path, a journal called *Sanmarga Viruthi*, was started, and efforts were made to collect money every month for its expenses. We have to conjecture that it could have been a monthly journal.

Here is the first ever announcement asking for help in the form of money for the journal:

"We who have received the highest life among all the living beings on earth, should have the knowledge and experience of the four fold dimensions of life: Virtue, Wealth, Felicity and Eternal Bliss — at the appropriate time.

As the *Sanmarga Viveka Viruthi* is the means through which alone we can know and experience such knowledge, a journal by the name of *Sanmarga Viveka Viruthi* is to be brought out as the first step. Individuals may endorse here below that they will contribute whatever they can every month, towards this, and thus donate as above so that, it is useful for them and for others".

Members of the Order of the Righteous Path.

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p.94)

Among the many who signed for donating amounts, as requested, we see the name of Ramalinga Vallalar as the first one. He had signed for a very big amount, that is, for a rupee!

Four years after the starting of the House of Truth and Charity, a school for the study of scriptures and universal religion was started on 11. 1. 1872. There is an announcement about it as follows:

"This is a school for the study of scriptures and universal religion".

"Those who wish to study here should be above 15 years of age, and have such characteristic good qualities as fair knowledge,

piety, compassion, broad-outlook, the controlling of thought, word and deed; and such disciplined good conduct as telling the truth, speaking sweetly, helping other beings, and be deserving to be eligible for a life of pure and righteous path."

"If those who study here get trained after some time for reciting scriptures, a monthly stipend will be given to them, according to their respective family status. They are required to recite for two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening".

Hail the Lord of Chidambaram

It is clear from this printed announcement that Ramalinga Vallalar planned to make the trainees of the school full-time servants for the propagation of the principle of Spiritual love and Universal Brotherhood.

We should bear in mind that the spiritual education given at the schools for scriptures and canons at Vadaloor embraced the basic virtues found in ancient scriptures and canons; it rejected the falsehoods which came into them later, and brought about an education for a new society of righteous path.

Thus, the *Ode on the Divine Light Supreme*, containing 1596 lines, which Saint Ramalinga composed in a single night, became a "testament" of the Order of the Righteous Path.

At a small hamlet called Mettukkuppam, at a distance of two miles from the plain of Vadaloor. wherein Saint Ramalinga lived right, from 1870. he built a hut in 1873, in the name of *Siddhi Valagam* and made it his permanent residence. He attended to all the tasks of the great movement for the establishment of an Order of the Righteous Path, by remaining only at Siddhivalagam.

This apart, he gave religious discourses every day for his followers who came to listen to his preachings.

There were four principal institutions which were instrumental for Saint Ramalinga's revolution in religion. They were:

1. the Order of the Universal and Righteous Path.
2. the House of Truth and Charity.

3. the Temple of True knowledge, and
4. Siddhivalagam (The Abode of Bliss).

The Codes which the Saint emphasized were also four. They were:

1. Attainment of Super-Natural powers
2. Eternal Awareness.
3. Conquest of the Senses, and
4. Supreme God Realization and Suffusion.

He stressed upon four disciplines:

1. Discipline of the Senses.
2. Discipline of Life,
3. Discipline of the Faculties, and
4. Discipline of the Spirit.

The great movement of "Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood" is a combination of the above organizations, codes and disciplines.

VIII

THE ORDER OF THE UNIVERSAL, PURE AND RIGHTEOUS PATH

Ramalinga Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace was one who came from a timeless tradition of sainthood in humanity. He himself remarks in one of his lyrics., "Am I not one who belongs to the holy band that represents a time-honoured tradition?" He looked upon Saint Gnanasambanda, the greatest of the Saivite religious heads, as his spiritual mentor. He placed Saint Manickavasaga next, and followed in his life the gospel of *Thiruvasakam*, composed by Saint Manickavasaga. He had a boundless interest in Thirumoolar's *Thirumanthiram*, considered a scriptural treasure by the Saivite religion.

This is revealed by Ramalinga Vallalar's utterances:

"Thirumoolar's *Thirumanthiram* is the foremost among scriptures. There are 8000 in number. *Thiruvasakam* is the foremost among invocations."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p.24)

"A perusal of *Thirumanthiram* will reveal the truth of this approach"

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p. 112)

Ramalinga Vallalar says, "Thirumoolar's *Thirumanthirm* is a scripture that explains the truth of the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path". This deserves the attention of the Saivite people.

Enemy of the Vedas?

Ramalinga Vallalar did not keep Brahminical scriptures as his ideal. He did not detest them either. He indicates discreetly that he learnt the art of immortality only through scriptures.

"The importance of scriptures is that they teach the means of attaining immortality. The first chapter of the *Kural*, speaks of this; it can be learnt through a proper teacher."

(B.K.Pillai, V. 4. p. 64)

Saint Manickavasaga sang:

"Oh, the All Pervasive!
Thou, extoled as Lord,
By the scriptures!"

Yes. God is not imprisoned in the scriptures. That is why Saint Ramalinga believed that God is one who could not be known through scriptures. He says the same in these lines:

"Oh, Supreme Light Divine!
Thou art infinite,
Crowning the canons and the scriptures!"

The Greatness of Scriptures

Saint Ramalinga did not approve of the interpretations of the Hindu scriptures and canons by orthodox savants, or the conventions that were practised. But he did not reject the salient principles found in them. He says:

"Hindu scriptures alone speak of attainment of spiritual and supernatural powers. No other religion speaks of the above mentioned powers and of the means of attaining immortality. Even if such references are found in other religions, they are in fact analogous to what is said in Hindu scriptures and canons".

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p. 68)

In some poems, he seems to reveal his dislike for scriptural works. The reason for this is different. We shall examine it elsewhere. We shall remember in particular that generally he did not repudiate those ancient scriptural ideas which dealt solely with Divine Grace.

God is One

With such a clarification, Vallalar accepted those ethical codes and exhortations stressed by Religious Heads, wise men of yore, and codified a number of ideals, according to the spirit of his times and in a reformistic manner. He explained older ideals. Let us understand them in detail.

Saint Ramalinga did not like the foolish "philosophy of many Gods". He accepted only Shiva as God. His Shiva is not to be pointed out by the differences of name and form, not by the male or the female. What then is it? Let us listen to Vallalar himself on this:

"Shiva means "*Satthchithanandham*". It consists of *Sath-Chith-Anandham*. These connote the *bliss* (*Anandham*) that results from the all pervasive existence (*Sath*) and the all embracing knowledge (*Sith*)"

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4:p, 12)

"Shiva means "The Infinitely Pure"; and "The Omnipotent".

The interpretation of Vallalar is not alien to the basic truths of all religions. It is also the inner meaning of the scriptures.

Names Many!

What Ramalinga Vallalar calls Shiva, is also acceptable to other religions. They can name him according to their individual wish. He himself sings:

"I shall call Him
God Pure, the Enlightened, the Source of All,
The Divine Splendour, the Lord Protector
One who has Supreme Power, the Source of Bliss,
Eternal Felicity, The Consort of Sakti,
God Infinite, God Supreme, God Absolute,
Infinite Bliss, Universal Spirit and Pure Bliss.
Such is the Divine Play."

"Hindu religion allows the worship of a single God, instead of multiple ones. This kind of worship helps the mind to concentrate, and for worship, this is also an easy way." Thus says the great poet

Bharati. Also, Saint Thirunavukkarasu, one of the four great religious leaders, sings thus:

"Oh, you unfortunate who debate endlessly!
Whatever you might say, baffled at heart,
Whosoever accepts there is one God
Has no other God except the Great Shiva."

When Ramalinga Vallalar was not released from the illusion of life, he worshiped and praised many deities-Ganapathy, Muruga, Saraswathy, Lakshmi and Vishnu - but even then the God that was in his heart was only "*Shiva*". This he reveals in these lines:

"Even when, perplexed by illusions, I suffered,
In reverence for Thee, Divine Giver,
In Thy likeness alone I saw others.
Did I ever think of anything else, Oh, Lord?"

The New Philosophy

Ramalinga Vallalar had collected the ways and means of receiving the grace of *God* in his code that God is one. He called this code, the *Universal, Pure and Righteous Path*. This can not be deemed as yet another religion. This is to be thought of only as a movement for the creation of a human society, free from religion. That is why Ramalinga Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace, added the epithets *Pure* and *Universal*, besides the self-sufficient sacred words, *Righteous Path*.

The benefits that those who had already followed and those who follow the Universal Pure and Righteous Path, founded by Ramalinga Vallalar, are many, indeed. The foremost among them is "the great life of immortality". His history tells us that it is his experience. He also states:

"The end of the Righteous Path is the revelation of the means of attaining immortality, and nothing else. He who dies does not attain the state of the Righteous Path. He who is immortal is the Righteous Path Seeker."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p.68).

"My path is the Righteous Path that conquers Death"

Vallalar was convinced that man could lead an immortal life. He promises the people of this world thus:

> "Oh, you! You shall live a glorious life sans death.
>
> Invent I do not, lie I do not.
>
> I state but the truth."

"Longevity will increase if sleep is avoided. If a man learns to sleep for one hour a day, he will live for 1000 years. Ever remember that the beautiful feet of the Lord conduces to attaining immortality."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p.67)

The Four Aims of Man.

The wise have prescribed four-fold aims for man--Virtue, Wealth Felicity and Final Bliss. For ascetics who wish to attain the fourth dimension - Final Bliss - Ramalinga Vallalar clarifies four individual objectives.

"What are the four goals that we attain? They are: 1) attainment of supernatural powers, 2) means of attaining immortality, 3) God realization and suffusion, and 4) conquering the senses."

"There are four disciplines to obtain these; The discipline of: 1) the Senses, 2) the Faculties, 3) the Life and 4) the Spirit."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p.49)

To those Pilgrims of Righteous path who wish to learn the art of immortality, Ramalinga Vallalar has a few thoughtful ideas:

"God resides in those who have abundant kindness. Though God exists, He does not do so, in those who do not have such kindness. We should ever love and be devoted to God."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p.65)

"He who attains a golden physique through Divine awareness, not only does die, but he also becomes one with God."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p.64)

"God flourishes specially in thoses beings who exhibit the quality of divine grace. He does not manifest in the rest. Therefore,

except when attending to calls of nature, they should, at all other times, love God and devote themselves to other fellow-beings. Thus, Devotion deals with the Compassion of the Mind, and Love, with the Compassion of the Spirit."

"Devotion to God informs that God suffuses all lives,"

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p.21)

Gandhiji also emphasizes the same view:

"It is foolish to say that God is found some where far above, in the heavenly world, or far below in the nether world. He is in every life we know."

(From *My Experiments with Truth.*)

There is No Caste or Creed!

There is not even the slightest place for religious and communal differences in the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path that Ramalinga Vallalar founded. But he was aware of the justifications for their origin. Religious and communal distinctions remained as obstacles at a later point of time for showing kindness to all lives as equal. Therefore, he enunciated the rule that Righteous Path Seekers should be above communal and religious distinctions.

"Religions are established for the discipline of the senses. Castes are created for professional conduct. The orthodox rigour of communal and religious customs stand against the effusion of grace."

"Therefore, the above mentioned traditional customs should be put an end to, and the truely spiritual observance of the Pure and Righteous Path of Shiva should prevail. If such a universal outlook is ushered in, kindiness will increase for the attainment of God's grace and the final bliss. Otherwise, it is not possible.

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p.22)

What are Heaven and Hell:

The follower of the Righteous Path believes in the concept of Heaven and Hell. But he does not think of them as stages after death. Let us listen to Vallalar's exposition:

"The body of man is where Heaven and Hell exist. The state of bliss—the worlds of Brahma, Vishnu, Rudhra, Mayeswara and Sadhasiva—exists within the human body, between the throat and the crown of the head. These worlds are known as heaven.

The state of abyss and of other Hells exists below the navel The Lord of Death resides in the body, left of the anus."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p.65)

Great poet Bharati who comes in the tradition of Vallalar also stresses the same idea:

"These fools think of reaching heaven after death.
Blow ye the trumpet
That these are wild words
That they quote from scriptures."

Who are Divine?

The follower of the Righteous Path sees the Divine in men. But these are not the divine beings that have been described to us in mythologies for many thousands of years. Who are these then? Here is Vallalar, the human, the divine and the blessed immortal, on this:

"The loftiness and the lowness of awareness distinguish the divine and the human respectively; there is no other reason. There should specially be Grace as part of the loftiness of knowledge. To indicate the grace of giving, Gods have four hands. Those who embody grace are blessed beings. They alone are Gods."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p.67)

By this explanation of Ramalinga Vallalar, we understand that the "divine beings" are not those who live in the heavenly world, inaccesible to men, but are men who can be divine in their earthly world.

Sage Valluvar, even before Ramalinga Vallalar, had emphasized this in the *Kural*:

"He is a man of divine worth
Who lives in ideal home on earth."

The Sevenfold Births:

Religionists talk of seven births. Valluvar also confirms this in the *Kural*:

> "The joy of learning in one birth
> Exacts man upto his seventh."

In another *Kural*, he clarifies that there are seven births in each one of the seven births:

> "Through sevenfold births, in memory fares
> The willing friend who wiped one's tears."

But Valluvar does not explain where, how, and in what manner sevenfold births occur. Vallalar illuminates:

"This body has seven births. Similarly, in each of the seven births, there are sevenfold births. These sevenfold births extend as diverse animal kinds and species and evolve into a higher birth. Each birth, in whatever period of time it is deprived of its being, remains dormant till the end of that period, and appears in the next period of time. After many births of this kind, it attains finally the human body. This body has seven births. They are as follows:

The first is the foetal stage in five months of pregnancy, the 2nd is the time for the growth of limbs, the 3rd is the birth of the child, the 4th is the period of childhood; the 5th is the period of boyhood; the 6th is the period of youthood; and the 7th is the age of maturity. Similarly, there are seven stages for plant life also. Further, there are seven material births, seven spiritual births and seven causal births. The material and spiritual births, as above are: State of Wakefulness, State of Dream, State of Insensibility, State of Dream in Wakefulness, State of Insensibility in Wakefulness, State of Dream in Dream, and State of Insensibility in Dream. Thus, births are seven. Causal births are mental resolves, the basis being consciousness and oblivion. When these are annulled, there is no birth. This can be annulled by kindness to others and spiritual solicitude. By these two, we can attain communion with the Supreme, transcending consciousness and oblivion."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: pp. 33-34.)

Thus it is evident on a philosophic basis, that there are seven-fold-births for the soul. Through kindness and solicitude for others, it is possible for the soul to release itself from the pain of birth in a condition that is free from consciousness and oblivion.

No Matted Hair! No Saffron Robes!

The follower of the Righteous Path does not become a saffron-robed ascetic. It is Vallalar's belief that he does not require saffron robes. Only after attaining the formative disciplines that such a follower begins his pilgrimage on the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path. These need not wear saffron-robes.

Vallalar laid down the wearing of white dress as the symbol for Universalism, and an emblem of victory. It is reasonable that those who became ascetics without the proper mental maturity, should wear saffron robes, atleast until such time they conquer their senses by struggle.

Not a Denial of Mythologies, but a Difference in Meaning!

The followers of the Righteous Path do not wish to proscribe mythologies. That is the business of the followers of the evil path, who lack philosophic knowledge. And also, the followers of the Righteous Path do not approve of the ignorance or the confusion which results from accepting the imaginary as true, without philosophic explanation. He stands midway between the follower of the evil path and the one in puzzlement. How does the follower of the Righteous Path philosophically explain mythologies? Here is Saint Ramalinga on this:

"The 63 Saints in the *Periyapurana* and other saints stand for philosophic principles. If we examine and follow each principle, then each one will give us rare power."

"The truths of *Sivapurana* and *Vishnupurana* also deal with the conquering of the senses. The annihilation of *Soorapadhma* (a demon) stands for the annihilation of evil."

"According to mythology, Lord Shiva drank the poison in order that the Devas might drink the nectar to attain which they churned the Sea of Milk. The Sea of Milk stands for the coconut, and the

nectar for the water of the coconut. The oil content of the coconut milk is the poison. Lord Shiva, the Triple Eyed, absorbing the poison (in the throat), to keep the nectar pure, stands for the three holes of the coconut, absorbing the oil in its milk, to keep its tender water pure."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p. 23)

"Gundodhara (the giagantic) was fed" means this: *Gundodhara* a big vessel of zinc. *Odarum* means food. *Tharan* is one who has no hungers. If the flower of zinc is given to one who has no hunger, it will cause extreme hunger."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: pp. 23-24)

The First Step for the Final Bliss

The singular profit that the follower of the Righteous Path gets is the great life without death—that is, a state of beatific bliss, without life and death. Vallalar's Code of the Righteous Path to attain this does not require such difficult efforts as *yoga*, penance, etc.

"No means are required. Learning some particular method and following it may offer a little illumination. It is likely that we get easily captivated by it, and become so proud as to lose it. Therefore, without delay, let us gain the awareness that all lives are the same as ours."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p.112)

"We have to have the key of this Grace to reach Him in His fort. His Grace cannot be gained, except through love, and love can be gained only through kindness to all lives. To conduct ourselves without harm to other beings is kindness to other lives. This is the first step for the attainment of the Final Bliss."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p. 62)

For all the World to Live ....

He who is the follower of the Pure, Universal and Righteous Path ever supplicates Divine Grace. His worship, like that of the religion-oriented devotee, is not based on selfishness, or the welfare of his family. He transcends his Self, his family, his kind, his religion and his land, and prays to God for the welfare of all the world. Vallalar himself explains this, both in prose and verse:

"It is not proper that one should pray for himself alone. He should pray for the welfare of all the world. If he does so, he gets all that he should have. A prayer, if at all, is only this way."

"Waking this sinner up,
In the midst of the dark night,
Thou bestowed on me Thy divine radiance,
And Thou shine from within me.
Oh, Thou Cosmic Dancer, Treasure of Bliss!
I pray to Thee
Thou shouldst grant to this world
The grace that I received."

"This is my prayer"

Prayer Grants an Intuitive Awareness!

The awareness of Art and Grace that the follower of the Righteous Path should receive is immeasurable. Only when he achieves all the awareness that it will be possible for him to live an eternal life and to serve all lives without discrimination. Can this awareness of Art and Grace be obtained easily? Saint Ramalinga gives a categorical answer to this:

With the help of devout prayer, man can master superhuman knowledge in the span of his life time. Such a man, if he tries to understand knowledge, with the vision of grace and purity of an eternal awareness uppermost in him, he will learn knowledge of a thousand births in a trice. This is the truth."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p. 113)

According to Saint Ramalinga who knew by intuition, it is easily possible to become aware of the knowledge of Art and Grace, by the power of prayer.

Yoga not Required

The important means for being the follower of the Pure and Righteous Path, is prayer—that is, meditation.

"What is the requisite for prayer, or its non-requisite? How to carefully observe these requisites? Vallalar explains all these in a few lines."

"We should ever be pronouncing in our thoughts, "Om! Sivaya Nama". We should see to it that this world is suffused with the power of Grace, Wealth, Creation, Meditation, and Wisdom".

"*Yoga* need not be practised. Once engulfed in it, we can not redeem ourselves from it. Nor can we redeem ourselves if we are always in communion with Shiva; in fact, a demented mind will result."

(B.K.Pillai, V. 4: p.114)

To contemplate God in the form of images is a certain kind of worship. The followers of the Righteous Path did not oppose this as did the followers of Arya Samaj and Bramha Samaj. Vallalar says:

"When God justly fulfills Himself in the soul-suffused body of man, it is a tacit convention to see Him as manifestations in idols and big trees."

(B.K.Pillai, V. 4: p.87)

Yes. *Sanmarga* (the Righteous Path) approves of idol worship only as a tacit convention in the case of common people.

"Meditation begins with the contemplation of a certain image. Image there should be. It should not be bare, or formless. Form will recede to become formless. The dual become one (the indivisible). How does the dual become one? The contemplator's self is obiliterated, and the contemplated image also is obiliterated. This is the Truth beyond comprehension."

(B.K.Pillai, V. 4: p.114)

In the Beginning, at the End ......

Before one becomes a perfect follower of the Righteous Path-he is in a state when he accepts, according to the "Dhvaitha" philoso, phy, the worship of an image in his mind. Later on, the pure-path-philosophy emphasizes, according to the "Adhvaitha" philosophy, the need for an imageless meditation. This is not opposed to the codes of ancient scriptures.

Though the philosophy of the Righteous Path was a concept current in the world of religion, it was not certainly 'current' in the sense in which it was explained by Saint Ramalinga, with the addition

of the words "Universal, Pure and Righteous Path." Indeed, it was our Ramalinga Vallalar who made *sanmarga,: the Righteous Path*, the gospel of a great revolutionary movement.

"Hitherto seers who were perpetrators of inferior illusions, had hidden the true significance of God. Wisemen, aware of primordial illusions, were also not available. The 'righteous path' is also not there. If righteous path were available, we would heve learnt intuitive experience and knowledge."

"Now is the time when God has induced us to know intuitively. Therefore, this time is the time for the Righteous path".

(B.K.Pillai, V. 4: pp.140-141)

Who is Saint Thayumanava?

Vallalar accepts that the followers of the Righteous Path had existed from immemorial times; he divides them into two categories: those who are followers of the Righteous Path, accepting religions, and those who are followers of the Pure and Righteous Path, disliking religious discriminations. Religion oriented Righteous Path Seekers can not become one with God, and only Pure and Righteous Path Seekers who transcend religious differences can attain Divine Grace.

"If you ask me whether it is true or untrue to declare that the Righteous Path Seekers through religion, like Saint Thayumanava and several other wise men, have become one with the Pure Spirit, my answer is, it is not true. Pure and Righteous Path will succeed; it will alone enable the attainment of the immortal state and supernatural powers. The other religious paths are only lower steps by which one can not at all attain union with God."

"Saint Thayumanava and the like are not Pure and Righteous Path Seekers. They can be described in a way as religious path seekers. There is no immortality in what they did, which could be only a means to an end, not an end by itself. When the righteous path is ushered in, they would be reborn, with sharper insights than what they had before, and would belong to the philosophy of righteous path seeking, and achieve union with God."

(B.K, Pillai, V. 4: pp. 91)

Universalist

Saint Thayumanava did not like one religion hating another. He attempted to find a unity between two schools of philosophy-the *Siddhantic* and the *Vedhantic*. But he did not aim, like Saint Ramalinga, to bring into being a Society of Righteous-Path-Seeking, unrelated to religion. In brief, he did not come forward to put an end to the differences between local and alien religions. He was particularly oriented to the Saivite religion, and he composed songs with a view to finding agreement between the Siddhantic and Vedhantic Schools of philosophy. Hence Saint Ramalinga considered him only as a religious path seeker. He spoke the truth in actuality. The Saint's declaration that religious-path-seekers could not become one with the Infinite Spirit, deserves the attention of those deeply involved in religion. The problem of "union with the Infinite Spirit" did not arise as far as the philosophy of the Dvaitha religious-path-seekers was concerned. But generally speaking, Saint Ramalinga had great love for and devotion to Saint Thayumanava. Saint Ramalinga had adopted his sayings in his preachings, *Songs of Divine Grace*, and in his letters to his disciples.

Bodies Triadic

Saint Ramalinga says that Man, from the time of his ordinary existence till his becoming a perfect Righteous-Path-Seeker, has triple spiritual dimensions.

He who treats all lives as equal and gives them unchanging love through the discipline of kindness, will attain the Body of Love.

Later, when he attains a state in which God resides in his heart because of his devotion and everlasting meditation, his Boby of Love is transformed into the Body of Grace.

Still later, when he attains an immortal existence, the Body of Grace becomes the Body of Bliss in its beatific communion with the ultimate Bliss. Vallalar calls this "Body of Golden Suffusion". Considering Saint Manickavasaga as such a kind of the perfect pure-path-seeker, Saint Ramalinga of Vadaloor, poetically describes the Saint of Vadhavoor, in these lines:

"To the ecstasy of those who do penance for days together,
Concentrating on the spot between the brows,and mortifying
their flesh,
Oh, eminent personage of the beautiful Vadhavoor!
Thou attained the Body of love,
And then the Body of Grace, And finally the Body of Bliss."

From the invocation, "O! Eminent Personage of Vadhavoor", it is evident, Manickavasaga had attained Godhood, befitting a perfect seeker of the Righteous Path. In the chapter, "Severing of Ties", Saint Ramalinga alludes to the Triple Dimensioned Body that the perfect Righteous-Path-Seeker attains and also to the "Body of Golden Suffusion," which is the "Body of Light."

"Following the Righteous Path,
I fulfilled what the heavens fulfilled,
Thou knoweth what I thus achieved.
I united the source, the bodies triadic,
With Thy radiant feet that dance in the Golden Hall.
Thou enabled me to succeed in whatever I did,
Thou gave me true bliss, waking me in my sleep."

For example, in the Chapter, "The Great Sermon", he speaks of the glory of God's Holy Grace.

"Thus, if the effort fructifies, there is no bar for attaining the experience of ultimate bliss".

(B.K.Pillai, V.4: p. 140)

Thus, Saint Ramalinga's criticism of Saint Thayumanava, as a result of his ideal of spiritual love and unity, can not be deemed to underestimate him in any way. We should hold that with his example, he had only criticised the condition of religion during his time. Even before Ramalinga Vallalar, the credit of bringing about religious amity and equality goes to Saint Thayumanava. The great poet Bharati, the spiritual heir of Ramalinga Vallalar, says as follows, of Saint Thayumanava:

"If such a saint as Thayumanava were to have lived in England, no student at school would be ignorant of him. Lots of fools, calling themselves educated, or graduates, strut about in our country, without

learning his sweet and divinely melifluous lyrics or listening to the history of his life."

(*Barathi-Treasure*, Vol. I, p. 77.)

These views of Bharati on Saint Thayumanava, are applicable to Saint Ramalinga also.

In the Pure, Righteous and Universal Path, there is no place for the differences and disparities between the sexes. The aim of the Pure and Righteous Path is equality between the sexes. There is a mixing of the feminine in the male and the masculine in the female, according to Vallalar. The difference between the sexes is only physical and not spiritual.

Let us Hear Saint Ramalinga's Views:

"The blending of the female in the male and the male in the female can be explained thus: The seven elements of Earth, Fire, Air, Space, Matter and Spirit, in the process of reproducation by the male and the female, blend to become the seven constituents of the human body. Therefore neither man nor woman be born without this coelescence. Further, it is folly to call the differences in human form as man and woman."

(B.K. Pillai, V.4: p. 32)

"The differences in awareness give rise to the disparities of the sexes. Spiritual awareness is the male. Awareness of life is the female Both these mean "intellectual and emotional awarness."

(B.K. Pillai, V.4, p. 80)

Women's Rights

The Pure and Righteous Path imbibes the idea that the differences of the sexes should be removed and that women also should advance equally with men, in all fields. The 'pure path' through religion does not stress clearly that women, besides their leading a worldly life, have as much right as men to attain divine grace through their seeking a spiritual path. But the Pure and Righteous path of Ramalinga Vallalar emphasizes this clearly:

"Women should be taught *yoga* and other spiritual means. Without discrimination, they should be given education. If they are

taught the nature of the faculties and trained, they will be easily on a par with us, during our final stage of attaining Bliss. This is also referred to in the *Kural*."

(B.K. Pillai, v.4: p.107)

The saint makes clear the truth that if men should progress in the spiritual path, women should necessarily have spiritual awareness.

True or False?

It was an avowed principle with some saints to reject the body. "The body is an empty nothing! It is a bag full of air. It is like the shell of a mud vessel made by the Potter (Creator)". This song depicts the human body as a mean object. Songs in this manner are innumerable; so were also the saints who sang thus.

"Oh, dear girl!
In this garden of earth,
The begger of a soul,
Praying for ten long months
The Potter, the Lord Creator,
Brought forth the pot of a body.
Handling it without care,
He dropped it and broke it."
"This body is a bubble of water
Know ye this illusion,
It will not last."

So sang Kaduveli Siddhar on the ephemerality of the body.

The Glory of the Body:

Contrary to this, only Sage Thirumoolar empahsized the rare and glorious nature of the human body and stated clearly the need for its preservation, thus:

"I deemed the body a disgrace once
I then found in it life's essence.
As God resides in the body
I take extreme care of it.

"For the Divine Giver, the heart is the shrine,
The fleshly body is the temple,
The mouth is the tower of entrance.
For the great seers, the spirit is the God,
The five deceiving senses are lustrous lamps."

"Those who decay in body decay in spirit,
They can not attain true wisdom and strength.
Knowing well the means of fostering the body,
I nurtured my body and thus cherished my soul."

The Shell of a Mud Vessel

Sage Ramalinga who came in the tradition of Thirumoolar, made the thoughts, found in the above lryics, seminal to the philosophy of Pure and Righteous Path, which declares that it could give immorality to the human body. Generally speaking, the soul resides only in a house of clay (the body). It is in this meaning that *Pambatti Chittar* thus sang:

"Taking clay from the pit of flesh
Making it a ball with the stream of blood
The Potter (the Lord Creator) made the vessel (body)
Dance, Oh, Serpant! It is good for nothing!"

But according to Saint Ramalinga, if one transcends religious-path seeking and becomes a Pure and Righteous Path Seeker, he can have the miraculous power of transforming the body or clay into one of "Golden Suffusion", like transmuting sand into gold. On every occasion, when he wrote to his followers, he had emphasized the need for taking care of the body.

Protect the Body!

The following utterances, from his letters to Irukkam Rathina Mudaliar, published in B.K. Pillai's edition of *the Songs of Divine Grace*, Book V. are on Saint Ramalinga's views on the protection of the human body.

"Instruments like our body should be carefully tended."
(B.K. Pillai, V.5: p.40.)

"In matters of eating and indulgence, you should protect our body with care, observing moderation in either." (B.K.Pillai, V.5:p.43.)

"As far as possible, the body we have received as a result of our virtuous life, should be nurtured with care and concern."

"I pray that when following the noble path in wordly life, you should do it with the same care with which one would protect his eye-sight. Also, my request is, you should treat your body with proper food and sleep." (B.K.Pillai, V. 5. p. 47)

"Your body and other faculties should be properly and carefully tended. Except this I have nothing else to say."
(B.K.Pillai, V. 5: p. 49.)

The above statements refer not only to the "body", but also to the "body and other faculties." Hence, Saint Ramalinga emphasizes the need to protect every limb of the body.

In a letter to Velu Mudaliar in Pondicherry he writes as follows:

"You should tend your body with the same care with which you will preserve gold."

Favourite Child!

An elderly person, called the "Swamy of Pondicherry", when he reached his final stage of life, informed Saint Ramalinga about it. He replied as follows:

"Do not be afraid of the present danger, by any means. No physical harm will come out of this. Though this happens because of the vagaries of the times, I shall certainly meet you and have the pleasure of talking to you by the power of divine grace. This is truth and truth at all times. These are not my words. These are the words of the favourite son of the Lord of Chidambaram. Even if some bodily harm occurs, do not worry. You will soon be happy to meet and speak with me. This is Divine will. Do not feel disturbed even a bit.

"All hail to the Lord of Chidambaram".
(B.K. Pillai, 5: p.91)

The Means to Beatitude

Householders, wallowing in ignorance, also wish to tend and protect the body, because of their desire to taste earthly joys. But Vallalar's insistence on body-care is because he knows that it is needed for divine communion.

"As the human body alone is appropriate for attaining beatitude which can not be attained by any other body, it should be protected by all means."

Who are the people fit for seeking the Righteous Path? Vallalar opines as follows:

"Those who are completely free from religion and creed, the main obstacle to the Pure and Righteous Path, those who have controlled their lust and hatred by their wisdom, those who have avoided killing and flesh eating—these alone are fit for seeking the Pure and Righteous Path."

(B.K.Pillai, V.4: p. 96.)

"Those who wish to be aware of the ideal of the Pure and Righteous Path, should not think of owning land, should not even dream of women, and should not be inclined at all towards gold. These three should be avoided."

(B.K.Pillai, V.4: p. 104.)

It is not that easy for man to achieve the Pure and Righteous Path as enunciated by Saint Ramalinga. However if an attempt is made, it is possible to progress in that path, according to one's ability.

Love of Language

The code of the Pure and Righteous Path transcends all the differences among nations, castes, creeds and religions. It forgets all these and becomes a universal code to unite all living beings. The great gospel of the Pure and Pighteous Path preached by Vallalar is the same one as pronounced by Saint Thirumoolar: "God is one and so is mankind". The same idea is imbibed in this utterance of Vallalar:

"Those that are equal, high and low—all mankind—should conduct worldly life in harmony".

Though the code of Pure and Righteous Path is devoid of differences, it accepts the natural and the inevitable differences of languages.

Even in Soviet Russia—a beautiful new socialistic world as the result of a great revolution—linguistic differences, granting equal status and right to all languages have been approved. This wos in 1918.

Vallalar who lived half a century before this had discreetly indicated that there was place for the love of the mother-tongue in the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path he visualised. He speaks of the glory of Tamil, thus:

"Tamil was taught by divine grace and command. Wisemen lauded it as the mother of all languages. It is a sweet-syllabled language."

"The Tamil language grants a divine awareness."

The love of the mother tongue is something which cannot be repudiated even by the most perfect saint. Nor is there a necessity to do so.

However great an individual is, to seek a success of his ideals, he has to work through an organisation. Even Gandhiji, with his incomparable spiritual powers, had to seek the help of the Congress Party through out his life, to work for the welfare of India. Lord Buddha, first offered his sacred respects to the *Sangh* by his call, *Sangam Charanam Kachami*.

The Cherished Order

Vallalar also realized that only through an Order of many thousands of devotees he could achieve a Society for Righteous Path.

"Mother, Oh, Mine!
My keen desire it is,
To found an Order of the Universal, Pure and Rightous Path
Of the golden hearted, and rejoice over it.
To install a shrine attached to the Order,

To let the great Order flourish for ever.
And it is the wish of this humble servant,
To sing of Thee and dance in ecstasy."

This separate Order apart, Saint Ramalinga wished to build a temple exclusively for the worship of the members of the Order of the Righteous Path. He also expressed his inner desire to stay in that temple and conduct the worship of God.

Sage Valluvar stated:

"The will-to-do achieves the deed
When mind that wills is strong indeed."

With a determined heart, as ordained by Divine Grace, and in tune with the above gospel of Valluvar, Saint Ramalinga started in 1865 an organization called *Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sangam*, the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path.

An International Order

Ramalinga Vallalar desired that this organization, transcending differences of caste, religion, language and country, should so expand as to function universally and to represent all lives. That was why, without accepting the leadership of the *Order of the Pure and Righteous Path*, he made the Lord Almighty its President. This is indicated by these poems:

"The First of the Universal, Order of the Righteous Path!
Thou Unique Cosmic Dancer, my Spiritual Guide and Leader!"

"The Lord of the Universal Order of the Righteous Path!
Thou Unique Cosmic Dancer, my Spiritual Guide and Leader!"

"Oh, Almighty!
Thou who resurrect the dead!
Hail to Thee Leader of the Order of Pure and Righteous Path!
My Path is Thy Path!"

But the members of the Order began to deem the divine dimensioned Vallalar as the President, instead of the Lord pictured on the wall,

and praised and worshipped him. Vallalar was pained at heart. He sang and exhorted:

"Brothers of the Order of the Righteous Path!
Kindly listen to what this humble servant,
With obeisance to your feet, hath to say,
Think of me as one among you in search of God,
Adore our Lord Almighty alone."

Vallalar's *Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path*, without attempting to oppose Scriptures, Canons, Mythologies, etc. transcended them and functioned as a social organization, above religion.

The First Ever Order

The Order of the Universal Pure and Righteous Path founded by Saint Ramalinga, was the first ever organization for socio-religious reform in the history of Tamil Nadu. It was not a religious Order, but of one of service for the creation of a Society of Righteous Path, sans religion.

It was Saint Ramalinga's desire that the Order started by him should eventually become one with the whole of human society as an Order of the Righteous Path.

Vallalar said that all those who follow the discipline of kindness to living beings who avoid meat-eating, and are compassionate-hearted, could join the Order of the Righteous Path.

Racial Discrimination

Vallalar distinguished all the members of the orders as "kindred" and all others as the "non-kindred". It was his belief that eventually, this distinction would disappear and all mankind would become "one kind", that is, a community belonging to the Pure and Righteous Path.

"My Lord the Father enabled me
To see worlds many and all the Universe.
I shall find my Path from now on,
Letting all join the Order of the Righteous Path."

The Ideals Codified

It is not known that Ramalinga Vallalar codified the ideals of the Order of the Righteous Path. However, they are found scattered in his poems, preachings in prose, and in his letters to his disciples. They can be codified as follows:

1. To believe that there is only one God for all living kind.

2. To realize that the best worship is that of Him only as Divine Light, and not in idol-form.

3. To create Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood among all linguistic communities and countries, giving up the difference of caste, creed and religion, totally.

4. To find Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood not only in the whole world, but also to find an emotional unity in India among the peoples speaking different languages, through fraternal feelings.

5. To create a society of equal justice, in which people will be able to eat heartily and dress comfortably, by the eradication of economic disparities between the rich and the poor.

6. To provide education to all people, without the distinction of the sexes, especially spiritual education to women, too.

7. To teach the ways and means of living an immortal life to the people in their respective mother tongue, particularly in Tamil to Tamils.

8. To eradicate totally the heinous custom of meat-eating and sacrificing living beings at the altar.

9. To preach the discipline of compassion to all living beings so as to consider them equal and to show them kindness and mercy.

10. To prevent the heartless wicked from indulging in politics, throughout the world and to establish the Rule of Grace of the followers of the Righteous Path through Grace.

Saint Ramalinga understood the word "Order" in the "Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path", in the sense of an "associa-

tion." This we understand from the lines in the *Songs of Divine Grace*:

"Thou Wealth of Divine Grace!
Who stood before the Association of the
Pure and Righteous Path"

An Order of Many Facets

Vallalar's Order of the Righteous Path was a giant organization, with many facets. Gandhiji, who came in the tradition of Vallalar, after taking up the leadership of the Congress Party, created a number of separate branch organizations for the purpose of:

Basic Education (Hindi)
Education through the Medium of Hindi
Eradication of Untouchability
Growth of Cottage Industries

As though to guide him in this regard, Saint Ramalinga of the Light of Divine Grace had established under the aegis of the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path, a number of branch organizations as follows:

Hall of True knowledge
House of Truth and Charity
Abode of Spiritual Attainment (Siddhivalagam)
School of Universal Scriptures.

Yes. As both Vallalar and Gandhiji wished to create a new world of divinity, suffused with kindness, we see a similarity of action in either of them.

Not an Eradication but an Integration!

Ramalinga Vallalar completely disliked caste, creed and religion. He himself announced it unmistakably in his poems. However, he knew the adage, "Do not undertake that which brings failure". So, when he began to act as though to give priority to Universal feelings, he included as the first word in the name of the Order he founded, the word "*Samarasam*": Universal. Before eradicating castes, he wished

to see an end to the differences among the castes of the "high" and the "low", the "great" and the "mean", and see an amity among them.

Before establishing a casteless society, he deemed it his first duty to put an end to the differences and antagonisms among castes, and see a Universal acceptance among them.

He brings this out unmistakably in the lines in the *Songs of Divine Grace*:

"Eschewing these differences of castes and creeds,
All the world should attain the Righteous Path."

He endeavoured to achieve this social reform through pure and righteous means, and not through the wicked ways of hatred, fanaticism, columny and opposition.

A Call to the People

Saint Ramalinga wished to achieve an amity not only among the human kind, but also among all living beings. Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace yearned to see such a divine world of spiritual love and unity as to see in it the picture described in mythologies of the tiger and the cow together drinking water from the same point. Only to work towards such a unity that he founded the Order of the Righteous Path.

He called upon the people to belong to the Order and follow its aims:

"Know ye the truth, this is the Universal Path,
Wake from your sleep, make bold,
And free yourself of the yearning in your heart.
Join this day the Order of the Righteous Path
You shall truly attain the good path."

"Do not fritter away your energy,
Do not believe this false world,
Do not waver or be weary,
Join the Order of the Righteous Path,
All paths will converge there soon."

Thus he sang and invited all the people of the world to join the Order. He registered himself as its first Member.

The Whiteman's Support!

According to Saint Ramalinga, many Europeans of an alien religion, supported his Order of Righteous Path and also the social reforms which he proposed to bring about through it.

He sings as though of a world-reception to his codes:

"I have got rid of the bad ways,
I have joined Shiva's Pure and Righteous Path,
Elated at the lofty path,
Great nations laud my path as the good path."

"The Righteous Path alone flourished,
Other paths declined.
All the world united at my call,
With my Lord's Grace of kindness to living beings."

We should construe the word, *Vannattar*, (great nations) here, as a reference to the Westerners who lived in India during his time. Perhaps, a few among the Europeans supported Saint Ramalinga's ideal of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood! It was indeed Vallalar's ideal that all the world should commonly attain the Righteous Path.on an international basis.

In some places in his writings, Vallalar referred to the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path as the Universel Order of the Pure and Righteous Path of Six philosophies, the Universal Order of the Pure and Righteous Path of Shiva of Six Philosophies, and also as the Universal Order of the Pure and Righteous Path of Scriptures.

Saint Ramalinga offers the following explanation for the name of the new "Order":

"The Universal Order of the Pure and Righteous Path may be taken to mean" the Order that observes the Fourth Path, the one ultimately sought by the philosophies of all religions. The four paths are:

1. Path of Devotion
2. Path of Duty
3. Path of Fraternity

4. Path of Righteousness

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p. 45.)

"The experience of the Pure and Righteous Path is not the same as the experiences of attributes, non-attributes, significations and ideals of religions. The Pure and Righteous Path is only the spiritual path. "Pure" means the "Void". Therefore, "Pure" coming as it does before the "Righteous Path", means that it transcends the afore mentioned experiences and religions."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p. 83.)

The Universal Order of the Pure and Righteous Path that Vallalar founded was not a new religion. It was not also a monastic establishment. It was an Association of Righteous Path Seekers to reform all the people of the world, who were wicked inside but were seemingly good from outside. The members of the order, because of their charitable disposition, were called *Sadhus*, ascetics, by the Saint.

God's Command!

Vallalar's founding of a separate "Order" for the task of propagating the Code of the Pure and Righteous Path was not because of his private wish. It was the command of God. The following lyric reveals this idea:

"Thou Unique Cosmic Dancer, My Spiritual Gudie
and Leader!
The evil code of many creeds and religions spread in
this world.
Therefore, not being aware of the good path,
The people of this world suffered in the darkness
of ignorance.
My Lord! Thou exhorted me,"
"Henceforth you eschew the wicked path
And lead the people through the Pure and Righteous Path
That bestows the divine nectar of Universal Love.'

Because Vallalar had said earlier, "To reform all the people of the world...", he desired and believed that the Order of the Pure and Righteous Path, started by him in Tamil Nadu, should spread as a great movement with many branches all over the world.

"When will the world be free of the
Clamorous ravings of these mad people?

When will the order of the Righteous Path,
Which is aware that God is one, flourish?
Will the world realise
Shiva, the Mystic of Mystics?
I know not and I am sad.
Thy holy heart knoweth my misery.
Need I tell Thee often?"

Thus he prayed to God and sought His Grace for the growth of the "Order".

In a few years after the founding of the 'Order', Saint Ramalinga also prepared a flag for the 'Order'. He unfurled the flag for the first time, on 23-10-1883, on a Wednesday, at 8 a.m., at Siddhivalagam in Mettukkuppam. The great discourse he gave on the occasion was published under the title, *The Great Sermon.* He explains in it the signficance of the flag as follows:

"At this very moment, God has induced the posing of unprecedented questions. Therefore, this is the appropriate time of the Righteous Path.

To witness this, just now, the flag of the Righteous Path has been unfurled. The flag signifies: There is a pulsation from the centre of the throat of the middle of the brows. At the end of the pulsation at the brows' centre, there is a membrane hanging from inside. The lower part of the membrane is white in colour, and the upper part, yellow. There is a nerve under it impelling it up and down. We can only experience this and be aware of it. Only as an external symbol of this, the yellow and white flag has been unfurled today, Hereafter all will begin to be aware of good experiences. Even when I attempt to utter truths, there is none to understand them. Now that a flag has been raised, all shall know the truth."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p. 141.)

IX

NORTH CHIDAMBARAM OF WISDOM

According to Saivite traditions, Lord Shiva is worshipped as consisting of the five principal elements—Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Space. Saivite canons have indicated sacred shrines for these, known as Thiruvotriyoor, Thiruvanaikkaval, Thiruvannamalai, Thirukalahasthi and Chidambaram, respectively. The most famous of these is Chidambaram. In Saivism, "the temple" always indicates "Chidambram". Only at this sacred seat, the Lord appears as a dancer. Apart from Saint Gnanasambanda, Saint Nandanar also attained Beatitude there.

The Vision of the Lord

It was at Chidambaram, known for its divine glory, that Ramalinga Vallalar attained a divine consciousness, even when he was a tender young child. He states this in his garland of devotional lyrics, known as *Arulvilakka Malai*:

"When I was young,
With parents I visited Thillai.
When the screen was raised,
I had a glimpse of Thee!
God, my True Kin!
Thou revealed the whole Universe to me."

The Sacred Glory Waned!

Thus, even from his childhood days, he worshipped Lord Nataraja who captivated his heart, as the principal deity. For this reason, he was also devoted to Chidambaram, the sacred seat. In due course his devotion to the sacred Seat of Chidambaram waned, and he was devoted only to Lord Nataraja. This we know from his letter to Thiru. Rathina Mudaliar, written on 20-3-1861:

"Nowadays, Chidambaram is fit only for a few days' stay for the worship of my dear companion, the Lord Nataraja, and not for any other reason, because of the spirit of the times."

Chidambaram or Vadaloor?

We also come to know that at one time he showed an interest in the renovation of the Nataraja Temple.

"Mother, oh, Mine!
My keen desire it is
To beautifully renovate, as prescribed
in the scriptures and the canons,
The great temple of Chidambaram with
its divine and ever-lofty shrine,
To adorn Thee with fragrant flowers,
And to see to my delight Thy Holy Form,
And to witness a pageant of a festival
in this earthly world."

From this "Petition from a Child", it is evident that he desired the renovation and consecration of the temple according to scriptural and canonical observances.

There is a doubt that Saint Ramalinga's reference in this song to the "Hall of Truth and Wisdom", may point to the "North Chidambaram of Wisdom". But this is not a fact. As he refers to a "great temple in Chidambaram", it should be construed that it is a reference to the "ancient temple of wisdom" in Chidambaram.

Chidambaram only!

As the Hall of Truth and Wisdom is lotus shaped, and eight-

sided, and built according to the common code of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path, and not according to scriptural and canonical ules, the utterance of Ramalinga, "to beautifully renovate as prescribed in the scriptures and canons" cannot be a reference to it. Besides, the "Hall of Truth and Wisdom" was a shrine built anew. As it is said "To beautifully renovate", in the above song, it is evident he tried to renew what was old and that was Chidambaram's "Temple of Knowledge".

Yes. The Universal, Pure and Righteous Path seeker and hater of scriptures and canons that Vallalar was, he came forward to renovate the temple of Chidambaram, as prescribed in the scriptures and canons, only because of his great devotion to Lord Nataraja.

In his final command to *Salai Sambandhigal*, in 1871, he notes:

"To let the Order of the Universal and Righteous Path of Wisdom and the House of Charity to flourish, and to let the Holy Halls of the Chidambaram Temple be renovated, the moment for my Holy Father and All Mighty the Lord of Chidambaram to grace the Order and the House, by his benign presence there, is soon to come.

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p. 105.)

It is clear from a publication, opposing the *Songs of Divine Grace*, that it was the Hall of Wisdom that Saint Ramalinga attempted to renew in 1866.

For some reason or other, he dropped the idea of renovating the Chidambaram Temple and decided to build a shrine called "the Hall of Truth and Wisdom", for worship by the members of the Righteous Path.

A "Story" is Born!

Another "story" is narrated for Vallalar's decision to establish the Hall of Truth and Wisdom at Vadaloor.

"While worshipping at the greatest temple of Chidambaram, young Ramalinga once requested the temple priests to show him the *secret linga* at the inner most sanctorum. He was prevented from going in and was advised to stand far away and offer worship. Greatly angered by this, it is said, Ramalinga wanted to create another

sacred seat, opposed to Chidambaram, and bring Nataraja over there and make him dance, and that was why he built a shrine called "North Chidambaram of Wisdom", in Vadaloor."

Thus said an orthodox Saivite who was against the revolutionary religious reforms of Saint Ramalinga, in 1904, in a book called *Marutpa Maruppu*: (*The Songs of Divine Grace Refuted, p.* 116.)

A Song of Pun!

The following song of Saint Ramalinga is cited in support of the "story":

"The Lord will come, dear girl!
Welcome Him to Vadaloor,
Blessed we shall be with boons when He comes.

He who dances on a single feet
and shines at the beautiful Golden Realm,
The Enlightened One,
The Lord of the Sacred Hall of Wisdom,

Will come, dear girl!
Welcome Him to Vadaloor,
Blessed we shall be with boons when He comes.

If you tell Him,
"Oh, Lord! Thou deigned to dance here to the great delight
of the devotees,
Despite the vast-space above for Thee to dance",

The Lord will come, dear girl!
Welcome Him to Vadaloor.
Blessed we shall be with boon when He comes.

If you tell Him,
"Oh, Lord! Here is space for Thee to dance without
restriction;
Whilst there Thou hast the vast Universe to dance.
Why shouldst Thou dance in a narrow place
Know the secret from me.

I utter not falsehood.
I swear on Thee, I state but the truth,"

The Lord will come, dear girl!
Welcome him to Vadaloor
Blessed we shall be with boons when He comes."

The opponents of the *Songs of Divine Grace* interpreted the above song as follows:

"The arena of Vadaloor is bigger than that of Chidambaram. The Hall of Chidambaram is cramped and too narrow for the Lords's dancing. There are eight Halls in Vadaloor, — the Hall of Wisdom, the Hall of Bliss, and the Golden Hall, etc. — Therefore, Lord Nataraja be fetched here."

(*Songs of Divine Grace Refuted*, *p*.116.)

If This were True ... ...

Except this particular song, there is no other bibliographical authority to strengthen the views of the opponents of the *Arutpa.*

(*Songs of Divine Grace*)

Saint Ramalinga was a supreme being who was madly in love with the Lord. It would not be surprising if he had asked the priests to show him the *secret linga*. In a song, "The Harmony Between You and Me",

"Oh, Lord! Desire wells up within me to embrace Thee
My soul stays within only in the hope of embracing Thee.
My arms reach out to hold Thy feet full of fragrance
Bliss overwhelms my heart as I hold them with love,"

he had depicted his immense love that gushed forth from his heart in devotion to the Lord. But the priests of the Chidambaram temple serve under orthodox restrictions. Therefore, if they had refused to show him the *secret linga*, we can understand their position.

There is no need to think that the Hall of Truth and Wisdom was built in competition to the temple of Lord Nataraja, because, the Chidambaram temple belongs only to the Saivites, while the Hall of Truth and Wisdom is the temple of the Pure and Righteous Path which transcends the differences of religion and creed. Besides, the former is based on Saivite canons, the latter is founded on a common principle

beyond the canons. It is therefore fair to say that Saint Ramalinga wanted to build a common temple, according to the common code conceived by him, and where people of all religions could gather for worship. Even before the founding of the Order of the Universal Pure and Righteous Path, that is even before 1865, Saint Ramalinga contemplated the building of a separate temple, adjacent to the Order. Ramalinga Vallalar's fraternal awareness was beyond conflicts and competitions.

Saint Ramalinga founded the Hall of Truth and Wisdom in 1871. Before that, he promised to the priests in Chidambaram that he would in 1866 renovate the Hall in the Chidambaram Temple. Before that, in 1865, he founded the Order of the Pure and Righteous Path. Even before that he expressed his desire to establish an Order and a temple adjacent to it. From this we know that even when he planned the construction of a temple, he also wanted to renovate the Hall in the Chidambaram Temple. Therefore, there is no need to import a spirit of competition in the construction of either temple. There is no warranty for this in his poetic as well as prose writings.

In 1871, the Hall of Truth and Wisdom was raised. The region where the temple was situated was called "North Chidambaram of Wisdom", and to avoid any confusion in the names, Vallalar called the larger temple in Chidambaram, the "Temple of Ancient Wisdom".

The Hall of Wisdom was constructed like a "lotus with eight sides". Saint Ramalinga supervised the construction of the Hall even as he stayed in Mettukkuppam. It was said that he performed many miracles during this time. Here is an account from the publication of the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path.

"As Arumuga Mudaliar, a contractor, returned from Madras, stating that no good timber was available at the timber depot, for the flag-post to be erected at the Hall of Wisdom, Saint Ramalinga advised him to go back to Madras, and said he would follow him. He went back accordingly. But the Saint was there before him at the timber depot in Madras, walking on the very tree-trunk that was suitable for the flag-post. Mudaliar was much amazed by the sight.

Later, Saint Ramalinga bought the trunk and entrused it to Mudaliar to be taken away. Even before Mudaliar could go back to Vadaloor, Vallalar was seen in Vadaloor.

This apart, Mudaliar was told by every one in Vadaloor, that the Saint was all the while there only, giving his customary discourses! Mudaliar was greatly struck, and fell at his feet. The saint told him: "This is the deed of God. Don't reveal this."

Lightning Strikes!

When the construction of the cupola of the top was going on, the ramp, supporting three broke, causing their fall. But they were not injured. This also is said to be one of the miracles, performed selflessly by the Saint.

On completion of the Hall, the followers had caused an expensive and beautiful pial constructed before it, with the help of the Tanjore Mahrattas. But Vallalar was angered that the pial was constructed not by the "kindred", but the "non-kindred". As the constructors of the pial were non-vegetarians, he alluded to them as "non-kindred". No sooner than the Saint got angry, there was a sudden- and torrential downpour, when lightning struck the pial which was burnt down. This is reported in the *Great Book of the Songs of Divine Grace*.

The opponents of the *Songs of Divine Grace* reported with elation that lightning struck only the Hall! Oh! what wicked intentions!

Worship Begins

A five foot tall imported, mirror, was obtained from Madras, to be placed at the Hall of Wisdom. Saint Ramalinga gave the mirror and also a lamp to the Hall of Wisdom, after a round of due observances of worship at his hut in Mettukkuppam.

Both the mirror and the lamp were duly placed at the Hall by Sabapathy Sivachariar, a senior priest. This Brahman priest was one who had, after divesting himself of the "traditional sacred thread" long ago and rejecting blind superstitions, adopted the Pure and Righteous Path.

Saint Ramalinga utterly disliked the use of musical instruments - whether bowed struck, or blown — and the loud recitations of slogams during worship. He declared that this kind of worship was totally contrary to the Righteous Path.

"To sing the hymns to the Lord, calmly and with impassioned love - this alone is in accordance with the principal aim of the Righteous Path". Thus Saint Ramalinga taught his disciples. He even disliked the ritual breaking of the coconut during worship.

Saint Ramalinga often preached: "If you wish to ritually break a coconut, you do it beforehand, mix sugar and sugar-crystals with the coconut shreds and make it a sweet offering to the Lord. Except praising the Lord heartily, pompous observances like ritual anointings, flower offerings and processions around the streets should be avoided. If you wish to spend for God, spend it for feeding the poor."

Once, on seeing a number of lamps being lit, he said that lighting such large numbers should be avoided, and that, keeping one or two, the rest could be given away to the poor.

Even after the commencement of worship at the Hall of Wisdom, in accordance with the Righteous Path, Saint Ramalinga stayed at Siddhivalagam in Mettukkuppam. But on every *Poosam* day in *Thai* (January), he had made it his practice to participate in the common worship at the Hall of Wisdom.

The manner of worship at the Hall of Truth and Wisdom, as conceived by Saint Ramalinga was not prevalent in any other temple of orthodox tradition. The Hall of Truth and Wisdom was the first temple of the casteless, religionless and classless new world of the Righteous Path that the Saint desired to found.As such, the worship at the Hall was not oriented to religion and it differed from the traditions of scriptures and canons.

The Seven Screens

There is a holy lamp before the huge looking glass reflecting a radiant light at the Hall of Truth and Wisdom, in Vadaloor. There are seven screens preventing the glimpse of the radiant light. During worship, these seven screens will be removed one after another, to enable viewing the radiant light. Saint Ramalinga interprets the seven screens as follows:

"This physical body is a manifestiation of the soul. It is an embodiment of the atoms. This atom has the radiance of a million suns. The centre between the two brows is a blend of the golden and

the white. There are seven screens typifying seven powers to hide this soul-light. They are:

1. the Black Screen, representing Primordial Energy.
2. the Blue Screen, representing the Power of Action.
3. the Green Screen, representing Divine Energy.
4. the Red Screen, representing Desire.
5. the Golden Screen, representing Wisdom.
6. the White Screen, representing Original Energy, and
7. the Screen of Mixed Colour, representing Pure Intellect.

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p.92.)

Vallalar interpreted the Hall of Wisdom as follows:

"The Hall of Wisdom represents spiritual light. The radiance within that light is God. The inner-light's movement is Dance. These are respectivey known as the Hall of Wisdom, Nataraja and the Dance."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4: p.70.)

Saint Ramalinga arranged for worship at the Hall of Wisdom not only on the day of *Poosam* in the month of *Thai* (January), but also every month in the *Star of Poosam*.

Saint Ramalinga Dissatisfied

A year after the founding of the Hall of Wisdom, Saint Ramalinga was dissatisfied with the manner of worship there. He established a new method of worship by laying down stiff conditions. Here is a notification on this:

"Hail to Thee, the Lord of Chidambaram"

The Hall of Wisdom: An Explanation.

From today the Hall shall be known by the sacred name of the Hall of the Pure and Righteous Path of Truth and Wisdom. The House shall be known as the House of the Pure and Righteous Path of Truth and Charity. The Order shall be known as the Order of the Pure, Universal and Righteous Path.

From today, a tin-lamp shall be placed inside the Hall of Wisdom, until the power of the Divine Light Supreme from God, the Divine Grace Supreme, is realized. Neither brass-lamps, nor those with a

glass dome should be used. The tin-lamps should be lit at the sacred entrance and taken inside, by proper persons among us. They should be pure of mind and body, and shall be under 12 years old, or above 72 years of age. Every four days these lamps inside shall be dusted and cleaned by either of them.

Those who come in for dusting should be pure of body after a bath, and should cover their feet with cloth. They should kneel on their knees and do the dusting and cleaning.

The lamps are to be lit in the same manner.

These 12 and 72 year olds, who do the dusting and cleaning, should be fully free from attachment to property, place and sexual desires, and should be kind, and be devoted to God.

During dusting and cleaning, those among us who happen to be there, should stand from without, pure heartedly, and pray silently.

None, for any reason should go inside. The key to the Hall of Wisdom should not be openly held by anyone. It should be kept in a box and locked and the box should be placed inside the Hall, and the key of the box, entrusted with the chief security officer.

I shall communicate the rest when the time comes.

—Chidambaram Ramaligam
(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: pp.108-109.)

This announcement was published, as per the English Calendar, on 18-7-1872, that is, six months before his disappearance. When the Saint said, "*those among us*", in his announcement, he meant only those affiliated to the "Order". All the three establishments — the Order, the House and the Hall - are now preceded with the word "Truth". It is worthwhile to note that he has thus enlarged upon the older names.

The First Temple!

We said earlier that Saint Ramalinga had accepted idol-worship as a tacit convention. But, as he considered the Members of the Order of the Righteous Path as the Citizens of the ideal society he contemplated, he founded the first ever temple of the Order which transcended religion, and introduced light-worship, far removed from image-worship.

He enabled those who participated in such a worship to name God in general terms, agreeable to all religious followers, unlike those indicated by followers of religion. Thus, he brought four new "petitions" under the name, *Righteous Petitions*:

1. The Mini Petition of Truth of the Pure and Righteous Path.
2. The Great Petition of Truth of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path.
3. The Petition of Wisdom of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path.
4. The Petition of Truth of the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path.

Saint Ramalinga encouraged the followers of the Righteous Path to worship God, free from the distinctions of name and form, by pointing to certain general terms, in order to bring out feelings of universality among the worshippers. And these terms are:

1. Supreme God Gracious, Unique and Great.
2. Lord, Rich in Grace.
3. Ocean of Grace, Solace Giver to the Weak.
4. All Mighty Unique.
5. God Intimate, Unique and Great, Supreme Light Divine.
6. God, Natural and True.
7. God, Natural and Beatific.

The Lord's Command!

Saint Ramalinga declares that he founded the Hall of Truth and Wisdom because of God's command to him.

He alludes to this in the first of his petitions, "Mini Petition of Truth."

"My Lord! Ocean of Grace and Solace Giver to the Weary!"

Thou indicated to us by divine discretion: "To redeem you from the enervating sufferings like death, to remove your weariness and despair and to enable you to attain immortal bliss, I will manifest myself soon at North Chidambaram of Wisdom, known as Parvathi-

puram, north of ancient Chidambaram of Wisdom. Let a Hall of Wisdom be established there for me to perform the Dance of Grace". There is great joy in us that you so endowed us with your Supreme Love, within and without, to see that the Holy of Wisdom flourishes without any obstacles, symbolising your Grace.

"We now launch ourselves on the decoration of the Hall of Wisdom. Oh! Supreme Light Divine! Dear Lord! May you manifest and endow us with your Grace, within and without, to let us carry on and complete the sacred task of decoration, without let of any kind.

"All Hail! Hail! To Thee! God Infinite! Unique and Great! Supreme Light Divine!"

(B.K. Pillai, V. 2: pp. 118-119.)

Thus it is evident that according to the command of God, Saint Ramalinga established the Hall of Wisdom.

As the leader of the Great Movement for the Righteous Path, the Saint graciously invited all the peoples of the world to come and worship the Lord at the Hall:

"Oh! People of this world, the world above,
and other worlds!

Do not be charmed by your life.

Consider life without the pain of death as real.

Come hither, truely desiring at heart to attain it.

My true Lord and Father Unique,

Performs miracles at the Seat of Knowledge and
Perfection at this hour.

This is certain indeed!"

X

THE PUBLICATION OF THIRUARUTPA

Ramalinga Vallalar had the makings of a divine poet in an ample measure. The more he sought divine grace, the more was the number of his devotional poems. It is possible that he had written more than ten thousand lyrics. The great poet Kamban composed twelve thousand lyrics for telling the story of Rama. After Kamban, the most prolific poet was indeed Saint Ramalinga.

The Greatness of Not Glorifying Man!

Saint Ramalinga never sang the praise of man in his poems. This is a fine index of the purity of his mind and his devotion to God. How to praise his greatness which even forgetfully refused to glorify man. "God is one who never leaves my heart even for a wink of time", said Saint Manickavasaka. Similarly, as Saint Ramalinga had always thought of God, he had perhaps no opportunity to sing in praise of man. Saint Sundarar uttered that even if he slipped and fell, he would remember only His name and that no change would be known to him. Ramalinga Vallalar came in the tradition of Sundarar's ideals.

Many donors offered riches unstintingly whenever Saint Ramalinga requested aid for the various establishments he founded, like the House of Truth and Charity and Hall of Truth and Wisdom. He never wrote any panegyrics even on them.

Those religiously devoted may bear this trait in mind.

Verses written when Nine!

It is said that Gnanasambanda composed *Thevaram* at the age of three, on his drinking divine milk which Goddess Parvathi gave him. Ramalinga Vallalar also makes mention of this:

"Oh, Gnanasambanda, the great mentor!
Thou who drank with delight
The divine milk at the age of three,
And virtues thus nourished,
Embraced asceticism!

Thou said,
If the soul attains awareness,
It will experience compassion.
In showing compassion to all
The soul will realise God."

Though Saint Ramalinga did not have the blessed good fortune of drinking divine milk, he began composing lyrics at the age of nine and went on doing so till his fiftieth year. In the 19th century, the only saint to sing of God alone was Saint Ramalinga. For forty years his task was to sing only of the Lord. We do not really know how many thousands of lyrics he composed. Not counting those that went with the winds, the ones that were written down must have been in thousands! Even among them, many must have been lost. The ones that have reached us in print are roughly six thousand poems.

Tearful Appeal Through Song

We should not construe that Saint Ramalinga totally forgot the people and surrendered to the Supreme God because he did not sing of men. He constantly thought of the people who suffered in poverty, disease and ignorance, and very tearfully appealed to God for the alleviation of their distresses.

Saint Ramalinga never had the desire to seek the acclaim of the world by preserving each of his poems and causing it to be printed for circulation throughout the world. Truly, Saint Ramalinga is the first and foremost in the tradition of Saints whose heart went out to the suffering.

The credit of following Saint Ramalinga in this aspect goes to the great poet, Bharati.

When followers wished to collect and publish his songs in book-form, Ramalinga Vallalar did not give his consent. This, humility, perhaps, is the unique quality of Tamil scholars and saints! Because of this, we may say, many thousands of verses have been lost.

The First Published Work

We had already made mention of the fact that Saint Ramalinga, during his child-hood days at 'Seven Wells', made daily pilgrimage to Kandhakottam and worshipped Lord Kandha, by making poems on the Lord on his own. Someone, belonging to the temple noted down those poems and published them in book-form. That was the Saint's first book of poems.

The book was called "*Chennai Kandhar Deiva Manimalai-Saranapattu*". The wrapper indicates that the book was published by Gnanasundaram Aiyer of Kayatharu, on the request of Muthu Chettiar of Palayam. It is worthwhile noting that the work was not named *Arutpa*, the *Songs of Divine Grace*. It is conjectured that the book was published in the year 1851.

The First Four Canons

After the publication of this slender volume, a few admirers took up the responsibility of bringing out an anthology of all the songs that Saint Ramalinga sang, as a *magnum opus*. Among them, Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar and Irukkam Rathina Mudaliar were notable figures.

As he was a saint who never sought for fame, he refused to encourage the attempt of his admirers. Disappointed by this, Rathina Mudaliar vowed to eat only once a day, until permission was granted, and he also informed the Saint of his resolution.

The Success of the Fast!

On learning of the fasting of his dearest friend, Saint Ramalinga, the very embodiment of kindness, became sad, and wrote to him as follows:

"From the day I left the city of Madras and settled here, I had composed many verses. I did not aim to have all of them written down. They are scattered at random. But, they can be gathered in two months. I shall go over there in *Panguni* (March), and I shall bring them with me. This is a promise. I shall make them available to you at your place by all means.

Dear as my eyes you are to me, I pray that you should follow what I write hereunder.

Ever since you wrote to me that you would eat only once a day until the poems reached you, I am not able to eat properly. I am like a starving man. To put me at ease, please write to me by return of post, stating that you have given up the condition of eating only once. Unless you do so, I shall not rest contented. I shall also eat only once, I swear on myself. Please let me know immediately that you have dropped your condition. The poems will certainly reach you within two months."

Friend Rathina Mudaliar's 'Just Struggle' succeeded! Otherwise, thousands of the *Songs of Divine Grace* would have been lost! The Tamil Land, and particularly the world of piety, is indebted to Rathina Mudaliar.

Who is the Saint?

Thozhuvoor Velayutha Mudaliar collected all the lyrics of the Saint and divided them into six canons. But Saint Ramalinga strictly ordered that the 6th canon should not be printed. It is said that Ramalinga Vallalar did not want those ideas to be current among all the people, as they were to be learnt and followed only by the Pure and Rigtheous Path Seekers. However, only the first four canons were printed and published in the year 1867.

In those editions the words, *Arutprakasa Vallalar* (*Saint of the Light of Divine Grace*) were printed before his name. Vallalar, arguing with Velayudha Mudaliar, required to know from him as to who permitted him to print those words. On seeing the Saint, a mighty embodiment of all kindness, so rarely angry, Mudaliar was badly shaken and he maintained a complete silence. After five minutes, the Saint emended the line as "Ramalingam Pillai of Chidambaram, the Sacred Seat of the Giver of the Light of Divine Grace". The

Saint, by virtue of his scholarship, conferred upon the Lord the honorific title that was bestowed on him by his disciples.

It is worthwhile to note here that Saint Ramalinga often in his songs alludes to God as "*Vallal*", (The Divine Giver).

The Song of the Lord is the Song of Divine Grace!

Onec Irukkam Rathina Mudaliar, in a letter to the Saint referred to him as Saint Ramalinga (Swami Ramalinga). In his letter on 28-3-1866, he exhorted Ratihna Mudaliar thus:

"I do not like myself being called Swami Ramalinga (Saint Ramalinga). As this is sensational, please desist from doing so!"

The Saint believed that God impelled him to sing from with in. Therefore he consented to the collection of his songs, being named *Songs of Divine Grace*. Because God sang from his heart, he had not eulogised man even in a single poem.

"The songs on Nataraja alone are noble songs.
The songs on humans are empty songs.
The songs on Chidambaram alone are sacred songs.
The songs on mortals are street songs.
The songs on the Lord alone are Songs of Grace.
Other songs are songs of illusion."

Singing thus, he discreetly explains the reason why he did not sing of men. After the publication of the volume of the *Songs of Divine Grace*, they were recited in every nook and corner.

Even "He" Received Them!

Yes. The *Songs* were widely and warmly received. Saint Ramalinga declares in a song that even Lord Nataraja received his *Songs* favourably.

"Whatever I sang apprehensively,
The Cosmic Dancer, my Father,
Who revealed me the truth, placing His Lotus feet on my head,
Was pleased to wear them as scriptures and canons.

From the very day I became aware,
Though they were not sweet songs,
Thou went pleased at heart to hear
Whatever old songs the devoted and the infatuated,
Babbled in love for Thee,
I sing only Thy renowned glory.
I do not know of other desires.
When Thou art father and mother to me
Is it fair to languish at heart in this world of illusion?"

Of the six canons of the *Songs of Divine Grace*, published during his life time and later, the first four were published in 1867, and later, the fifth in 1880, and finally the sixth in 1885.

The Sixth Canon ....

Because of the ban imposed by the Saint, Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar stopped with the printing of the first four canons of the *Songs of Divine Grace*. In 1880, the fifth canon was published by Mudaliar himself. Afterwards, the followers in Madras of the Pure and Righteous Path caused the publication of the sixth canon, in 1885. The foreword states:

"This divine book called *Thiruarutpa*, (*the Songs of Divine Grace*), is divided into six canons. The first five form a single category and the sixth is a separate one. According to the sacred utterance of our master, the sixth canon is only for those practitioners of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path. Those who follow the sixth canon may be said to have attained as shown by the Saint, the ideal of the Uniersal, Pure and Righteous Path, namely, Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood, by adopting compassion to living beings as worship of God. It is for this reason that we have made the first five canons into a single work and the sixth canon alone as a separate one."

It is evident from the publisher's note that Thozhuvoor Velaupha Mudaliar, in obedience to the injunction of the Saint, printed the sixth canon, not during, but after his life-time. We should also note that it was published not in the name of the Order of the Universal, and Righteous Path, but by the "Devotees of the Order".

Revolutionary Lyrics

The first five canons contain only devotional songs—particularly those on the deities of the seats of Thiruvotriyoor, Thiruthanikai, and Kandhakottam. The sixth deals with the lyrics sung by the Saint during his stay at centres like Ancient Chidambaram of Wisdom, North Chidambaram of Wisdom, and Siddhiyalagam. Perhaps, they were written during his stay in Karunguzhi.

Only in the sixth canon, we see his revolutionary thoughts on religious reform which we do not find in any of the Saints who appeared before him. We need not think that he composed the sixth canon, only after composing all the songs in the five canons. There is confusion because the sixth canon has been printed as a separate book. But that is not so.

Saint Ramalinga had divided those who wish to follow the Pure and Righteous Path into two groups – "the practitioners" and "the attainers". As observed in the sixth canon, only "the attainers" are obliged to transcend the differences of caste, creed and religion in their life. Even the "practitioners" should train themselves for such a life. It was Vallalar's wish that the whole of human society, accepting the ideas found in the sixth canon, should first become "practitioners" and finally, "attainers" in their life. Perhaps, it was in accordance with his wish that the sixth canon was made available to the people, after the Saint's life!

The Practitioners and the Attainers

Though Saint Ramalinga gave half-hearted consent for the publication of the *Songs of Divine Grace*, he was not enthusiastic about making available all his songs. This is evident from a letter he wrote to a friend, on 18-11-1868.

"Either you or Thiru. Selvaraya Mudaliar, may publish according to what you think, only such songs as have been impelled by God from with in me."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: pp. 59-60.)

At one point, Saint Ramalinga detested the study of scriptures, and wished to devote all his thoughts to God. To an admirer who sent him an old palm-leaf-script, he wrote thus:

"Your book and your letter reached me one after another. The book came at a time when I was most disinclined. I swear on God that as my mind is inclined only towards God, and to nothing else, I was not certainly attracted by this palm-leaf or the childish play on it. Someone needlessly wasted your time. I was sorry for this."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p.58.)

The Battle has Begun!

Now Saint Ramalinga's great movement of the Righteous Path flourishes well and takes deep roots among the people. Many poor people are fed daily at the *House of Truth and Charity*.

The *North Chidambaram Temple of Wisdom* becomes the stronghold of the Righteous Path practitioners who hate differences of caste and creed.

Siddhivalagam, established at Mettukkuppam becomes a forum for propaganda against superstitious beliefs. Everyday, Saint Ramalinga's evangelical voice rings like a clarion-call.

The Order of the Righteous Path sees many branches and grows from strength to strength.

Many scholars and learned-men and Government Officers from all over Tamil Nadu continued to make a "pilgrimage" to Vadaloor. With a view to staying near the Saint, some of them bought pieces of land, constructed houses and settled in Vadaloor.

A New Era is Born!

Many preachers, capable of spreading reformative socio-religious ideas, appeared throughout Tamil Nadu, and engaged themselves in ideological debates.

Though the fifth and the sixth canons were not printed, the songs found in them were learnt and sung throughout the land.

To put it briefly, a new era in Tamil Nadu was born. This worried the orthodox Saivites who took up cudgels against Ramalinga Vallalar.

After the founding of the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path, Saint Ramalinga's ideas of socio-religious reform

quickly spread throughout Tamil Nadu. Like rains coming down at the appropriate season, Ramalinga Vallalar poured forth his verses. His *Songs of Divine Grace* were sung in temples, and in streets and homes.

The Songs of Divine Grace sung at Temples, Homes and Schools

All devotees who went to the temple to offer deep worship before the divine idol, prayed to the Lord, with the song beginning with "Let me have the kinship of the good who supplicate Thy feet with singleness of devotion". We may say that there was not a single devotee who did not sing Vallalar's song: "My Lord! Thou art the green-boughed tree of cool shades, giving relief in mid-summer."

These temple worshipping devotees apart, mendicants seeking alms for homes, sang such musical and invocatory lyrics like this one, and introduced to every home the revolutionary ideas of Saint Ramalinga:

> "Oh, Lord of the Effulgent Universe! Unique Ambrosial Elixer!
> Oh, Honey of Divine Joy! Feast Grace!"

Apart from elders, the youngsters at school sang such devotional songs as this one, and made the schools serve as temples:

> "Oh, Divine Joy Giver to the informed and the illiterate alike!
> Oh! Divine Light Giver to the ignorant and the aware alike!"

Tamil women who came in the tradition of the divine Avvai, Andal and Punithavathy, joyously danced to the songs of the Saint and transformed every home into a temple.

At wedding houses and elsewhere such songs as these were sung;

> "Dear Girl! Declare that you prostrated
> before the Lord"

The Songs of Divine Grace even at a Funeral!

At funeral processions, when the ceremonial conch and the gong went, this song,

> "The Lord of the Supreme Light Divine is He
> Who has mastered me!

The Blissful Lord is He who dances
At Chidambaram,"

was sung as a religious ritual and observance.

Whenever, more than one Shiva devotee assembled, the slogan of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path—"Lord of Supreme Light Divine!" "Lord of Infinite Love Divine"—was heard.

Vaishnavites also sang!

The Saivites apart, Vaishnavites also sang to their heart's content the *Songs of the Divine Grace.*

"Oh, holy Tree that gives the fruit of virtue!
My mentor!
The Companion of my Soul!
My King!
Oh, Lord, fair as a flower and firm as a hill!
Thou who bounded the ocean.
Oh, Gem, who once subjugated the wicked
Ravana of Lanka with your bow!
Oh, Rama! Divine Giver and embodiment of truth!
I desire nothing but Thy Divine Grace."

We may say that all Vaishnavites, when they offered worship to Lord Vishnu, sang such perennial lyrical garlands from the "sacred odes" on Lord Rama in the *Songs of Divine Grace.*

A publication of the opponaets of the *Songs of Divine Grace* declares that people, lost in the devotional songs of Ramalinga Vallalar, forgot the old songs of *Thevaram*, *Thiruvasakam* and *Thirupugazh.*

"Some deem 'that Ramalingam Pillai' as equal to religious heads and cherish and glorify his songs as equivalent to the songs of *Thevaram* and *Thiruvasakam.* They also recite those songs during their prayers and observances, and when they worship Lord Shiva. Sometimes, at a few Shiva temples in Madras, they recite only Ramalingam Pillai's songs, stopping the recitation of the divine songs of *Thevaram.*"

Poliarutpa Maruppu: *A Counter to the False Songs of Divine Grace*) pp. 14-15.

This account of the opponents only bears testimony to the great popularity of the songs of Vallalar among the people.

The statement of the opponents of *the Songs of Divine Grace* that the songs of *Thevaram* and *Thiruvasakam* were totally ignored may be an exaggeration. It if this was so, there was no reason for the orthodox Saivites to regret. Even if the songs had changed, the traditional code of devotion did not change! In fact, they should have felt happy that there was a renaissance in the ways of worship. But their attitude was otherwise.

Opposition to the Songs of Divine Grace!

The orthodox Saivites began to hate Saint Ramalinga. Hiding their differences of opinion on the ideals, they slandered and censured him as an individual. Though Saint Ramalinga disowned the title, "*Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace*", his opponents publicised it in such a manner as to make it appear as though Vallalar conferred the title upon himself. They also began to hate the name, *The Songs of Divine Grace* given to his songs. Let us 'reveal' this through their very publication:

"Though a number of Saivite scholars and poets, immeasurably superior to Ramalingam Pillai, have authored immortal works, neither they, nor their followers ever called themselves "*Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace*" or their songs the "*Songs of Divine Grace*". When such was the case, Ramalingam Pillai, born in Marudhoor, deeming himself as Lord Shiva, had conferred upon himself the very title of the Lord, "*Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace*". By naming his songs *Songs of Divine Grace*, (*Thiruarutpa*), which name is appropriate only to the Twelve Sacred Canons, he had committed sacrilige against the Lord, insulted His devotees and also repudiated the Holy Tamil utterances." (*Counter to the False Songs of Divine Grace* pp. 3-4.)

These objections were raised during and after the life of Ramalinga Vallalar. The "*Counter to the False Songs of Divine Grace*" introduces the important men behind these objections.

"His Holiness Shree Subramania Swamigal, Chief of the Thiruvaduthurai Monastery, condemned as most improper, Ramalinga Vallalar for his having immortalized mortal souls in his songs, contrary to Advaita and Siddhanta principles and established customs of castes, and for his calling himself "Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace", and his songs, *Songs of Divine Grace.*"

"Apart from him, His Holiness Shree Shunmuga Thambiran Swamigal of Dharmapuram Monastery, and his Holiness Shree Arumuga Thambiran of the Thiruvannamalai Monastery had similarly opposed. Great scholars, Muthuchidambaram Pillai and Kottaiyoor Swaminatha Desikar, condemned and preached that the songs extoling Rama, who was called "human" even by Vaishnavites, as divine, could not be *Songs of Divine Grace.*"

(*Counter to Arutpa*: *pp*, 5-6.)

Arumuga Navalar

The monastic chiefs criticised Ramalinga Vallalar, particularly for his glorifying Vaishnavite Gods.

At a time when resistance to Ramalinga Vallalar developed from the Saivite Monastic Heads, and from the scholars attached to them and from Siddhanta schools, in Tamil Nadu, a great savant by the name of Jaffna Nalloor Arumuga Navalar from Sree Lanka came to Tamil Nadu. He stayed at the Thiruvavaduthurai Monastery and devoted himself to the task of propagating Saivite Philosophy.

It is necessary here to write in detail about Nalloor Arumuga Navalar. The great Navalar was an incomparable scholar in the grammar and literature of Tamil Language. His learning in such Siddhanta scriptures as *Sivagnanabotham* was impeccable. He also had sufficient knowledge of English and Sanskrit.

Because of the Christian Father's propaganda, Religious conversion was a daily occurrence during the time of Navalar, in the regions of Jaffna, in Shree Lanka. It was Navalar who protected the Jaffna Tamils, not only by making them remain in the Saivite fold, but also inculcating in many of them, knowledge of the scriptures and prayer-books.

A Terror to Alien Religions!

At Vannarpannai in Jaffna, he established a school for Saivite enlightenment. At Chidambaram also he established a similar school.

It is stated in the *History of Arumuga Navalar*, written and published by Jaffna Nalloor T. Kailasappillai that "but for the advent of him who is a terror to alien religions, the whole of Jaffna would have become Christian. In those days, all high ranking officers were indebted to those Revered Fathers in many ways. Their power would have converted many a Saivite temple into Christian Churches." This also well demonstrates Navalar's involvement in the development of the Saivite religion. He renounced marriage and worldly life, remained a bachelor throughout his life and was initiated into Saivite asceticism.

Navalar learnt English at a school run by Father Peter Percival. Compelled by Father Percival, he consented to translate the Bible into Tamil. Next to Ramalinga Vallalar, the credit of enriching Tamil Prose in the 19th Century goes to Navalar.

Dislike of the Songs of Divine Grace

Navalar's visit to Tamil Nadu was opportune to the opponents of the *Songs of Divine Grace*. As one with an orthodox bent of mind, Navalar did not accept the reformistic ideas of Saint Ramalinga. He was afraid that the Saivite religion might be destroyed by Vallalar's preachings. The reason for his fear was his own ignorance of the changing spirit of the times. The Heads of Monastic Houses in Tamil Nadu poisoned his mind and exploited him against Vallalar. The great Navalar became an excellent advocate for the dispute these Heads had already raised against the *Songs of Divine Grace*. Navalar was extremely irritated that people respected Saint Ramalinga and placed him on a par with such religious chiefs as Appar, Sambandha, Manickavasaka and Sundarar. He also thought that, lost in the divine songs of Ramalinga Vallalar, the people might forget the songs of *Thevaram* and *Thiruvasakam*.

The Two Meet

In a situation like this, Saint Ramalinga and Arumuga Navalar

visited Chidambaram at the same time. Exploiting this opportunity, some of the priests of the temple of Lord Nataraja, on the day of the *Arudhra Darshan*, in the year 1869, organised a meeting at the big hall in the temple. Vallalar spoke at the meeting, explaining his principles of the Universal and Righteous Path. The orthodox who disliked Saint Ramalinga, organised a rival meeting with the help of Arumuga Navalar and induced him to condemn the Righteous Path Movement.

A number of rival-meetings were held by either side, and the polemics intensified.

In such a situation, Arumuga Navalar filed a suit at the Cuddalore Court, stating that Ramalinga Vallalar had defamed him.

Tradition has it that Navalar filed a suit objecting to the name *Arutpa*, the *Songs of Divine Grace* but the court documents show that it was only a defamation suit.

Vallalar declared at the Court that he had not used the defamatory words as pointed out by Navalar. Navalar did not prove his charge. Therefore the defamaion suit was dismissed. Concerning an incident in this case, there is a traditional account which is as follows:

"On the day the case was taken up for a hearing, a large gathering, representing both sides, had assembled at the Court. All were-eagerly expecting the arrival of the Saint. There was a sudden commotion among the people. A figure, with a while robe enveloping his body upto the knee, walked towards the court. Of medium height and lean frame, with an upright carriage and clear, semi-fair complexion, with a long nose and sparkling eyes, and with a touch of sadness on his face, Saint Ramalinga walked into the court. On seeing him, everybody stood up. Arumuga Navalar also stood up.

On seeing this, the judge was surprised. The judge exclaimed, "You who filed the case, have also stood up!"

Navalar replied, "I stood up because he is great." (According to a report by Thumilan in the *Kumudham* of 24.8.1961.)

Though Navalar was ideologically opposed to Ramalinga Vallalar, he understood his greatness as an individual and deeply respected him. This is evident from the way he stood up and showed his respect at

the Court. That such a great man as he should have shown opposition to Vallalar was perhaps because of the playful wish of God!

It is not reported that any of the priests of the Nataraja temple showed opposition to Saint Ramalinga. It is known that many among them supported the Saint. Contrary to this fact, those who belonged to the Self-Respect-Movement at a later time, had concocted a story that all the priests of the Chidambaram temple were against Saint Ramalinga. There is no proof whatsoever for this.

Some of the priests of the Chidambaram temple, who supported Ramalinga Vallalar filed a separate criminal suit against Arumuga Navalar. The following note on the outcome of the suit is from the *Biography of Arumuga Navalar*:

"He thought that he would be sentenced in the suit against him by the priests. On the day of the hearing, after finishing his morning rituals, he handed over the idol to his disciple, Sadhasiva Pillai, and told him that if he was sentenced, he would give up his life. He instructed him to immerse the idol in the Ganga. He left for the court. To a tough question by his opponents, he answered intensely, with tears in his eyes. The judge was greatly surprised. In this case, only his opponents were punished!"

Navalar's suit was not for Saint Ramaling's defaming him at a public meeting. He accused Saint Ramalinga of abusing him in private when he was in coversation with a few devotees, at the Hall of Thousand Pillars in Chidambaram. What the *Counter to the Songs of Divine Grace* states about this "libel" is this:

"Saint Ramalinga was angry and jealous that Arumuga Navalar condemned his songs. At the instance of a few who had gathered round him at the Hall of Thousand Pillar in Chidambaram, he began to explain the meaning of "Navalar" (*The Able Tongued*) by stating that it meant "a man without an able tongue", "A man with an ill-tongue", "A man with an annoying tongue", etc."

From Madras to Chidambaram

The groups attached to Navalar and Vallalar continued their debates for two years. Both Chidambaram and Madras proved to be principal battle grounds. The followers of Navalar published *The Counter*

to the False Songs of Divine Grace (*Poli Arutpa Maruppu*). It contained fifty pages and was published in the name of Thiru. Mamandur Thiagesa Mudaliar. But Thiru. Kailasa Pillai, the author of the *Biography of Arumuga Navalar*, states that Navalar himself wrote it.

All the writings of Navalar were collected as *Arumuga Navalar Prabandham* (Compendium). *The Counter* also is included in it. It is unbelievable that such a man of immense scholarship as the great Navalar, should have published his attack on Vallalar, which is of a low quality, in the name of another person. "Even Homer nods". they say! This is such an incident.

The *Arutpa*-camp also was not idle. They replied to the Navalar-camp, with a publication called, *Kutharkaranya Nasa Mahaparasu* (*The Great Axe to Destroy the Jungle of Sophistry*).

The Navalar-camp released a counter called *Kutharkaranya Nasa Mahaparasu Kandanam*, (*A Condemnation of the Great Axe to Destroy the Jungle of Sophistry*).

The *Arutpa* - camp published a book called *Thiruarutpa Thushanai Pariharam*, (*A Remedy to the Condemnation of the Songs of Divine Grace*).

Velu Mudaliar in a poetic attack on the opponents of the *Songs of Divine Grace* comes out as follows:

Those who praise the songs of Saint Ramalinga are the righteous. Wicked are those that do not do so."

A Letter from a Righteous Path Seeker

A Member of the Order of Righteous Path gives the following information on the counter-propaganda of Navalar:

"While delivering his discourses here, Arumuga Navalar spoke ill of the *Songs of Divine Grace* Not being able to tolerate that, someone, after a few days, circulated a publication called *Thiruarutpa Thushanai Pariharam*, (*A Remedy to the Condemnation of the Songs of Divine Grace*). I did not want to send it to you as it contained the condemnation of Navalar. However, I am sending it to you so that you may know of the wicked act of Navalar.

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5: p. 126).

This letter was from Irukkam Rathina Mudaliar, to another member, Thiru. Shunmugam Pillai, on Navalar's lecture delivered in Madras.

Vallalar Pained

Though Vallalar was made to involve himself in the controversy, the gracious Saint was pained at heart that matters had come to such a pass. He was saddened that he who had undertaken to reform the human kind was given so much annoyance by the "tradition lovers." Occasionally, he rebuked himself for his participation in the controversy, as in the following poem:

"Oh, Lord, Divine Performer and Friend!
I had been arguing loudly with others
out of ignorance and annoyance.

Only later did I become aware by Thy grace.
Oh, Supreme Being!
Thou knoweth that I ached and shuddered,
thinking of Fate.

Mother, Oh, Mine!
When others were adverse to me,
Afraid of enmity, I hid myself and stood aloof."

Had Ramalinga Vallalar, like Saint Thayumanava, stopped with his reformistic ideas in his poems, there would have been no resistance to him. Only because Vallalar started his Movement of the Universal and Righteous Path, and endeavoured to offer food to the hungry, and end the sufferings of the people, as a result of their superstitions customs and habits, with a view to founding a new society of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood, did he become involved in controversies and debates. He sings in pain thus:

"Good or evil I do not know,
My mind is so much with the Lord of Thillai,
That other things of this mundane life are not for me.
Even if I err before Thy Grace,
Instead of correcting me,
Wilt Thou stand aloof as others do?

Is it not custom,
The Father should correct the child?"

"Whenever my heart went after wordly affairs,
Only for the sake of compassion to living beings,
That I appealed to Thy Holy Feet anxiously,
And still continue to entreat Thee.
My soul and my compassion for souls are not two but one.
The One in my heart!
I swear on Thy Holy Feet,
If compassion is gone so is my soul."

"Oh, Supreme Lord, worshipped by leaders all!
Even today my heart, my unrelenting wisdom,
And my self exist in this mundane world,
Only for the sake of compassion to living beings.
What shall I do?
My soul is nothing but compassion.
Thy sacred heart knoweth,
If this eternal compassion is gone, so is my soul."

He states in these poems that he was interested in service to the world because of his compassion for all living beings, and that it was an inseparable part of him, and that the day he was without compassion, he would be no more. This was how he entreats God. Even when opposition grew to Himalayan proportions, he never thought of retreating from his service to all living beings.

We have to believe that Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace, approved of his work being named, *Arutpa*, the *Songs of Divine Grace*. It was not because of his vanity. As he declared in his invocation that these *Songs of Divine Grace* were only the *Songs of* Lord Nataraja, we may think that he wishes only to reveal the glory of the Lord of Chidambaram through these *Songs of Divine Grace* and not his fame.

"I learnt the books of this false world
My Mother, it is Thou who taught me.

I lost interest in that study.

Did I lose it? Thou made me lose it.

Then I held to Thy feet with the conviction that they alone are my guide.

Even that Thou made me hold them

Ignorant I was I pretended as though I received Thy Grace.

My Lord! Even that did I pretend or did Thou make me pretend?"

Would he, who sang that "all is by His Deed", name his songs *Songs of Divine Grace*, in pride? What are his advantages by such naming? Would he who had renounced all the pleasures of the world, be inclined towards fame?

While explaining the special characteristics of the Members of the Order of the Righteous Path, he sang: "Viewing all lives on earth as children, the brotheren of the Order of the Righteous Path will speak of them with motherly affection."

Would Vallalar abuse Arumuga Navalar who was such an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva. Perhaps, fate desired that he should be introduced in such terms!

The Opponents of the Songs of Divine Grace are also Kindred!

The following lyric of Vallalar reveals that he considered even those opposing Saivites, who carried on a debate against him, as his kindred.

"Ye men who debate in discord!
Listen to these words.
Before your time ends.
Come and extol the Lord who dances in the Hall of Grace.
See that the Lord will receive Ye in his divine heart
Unmindful of the evil words that you spoke,
As ye are my kin,
I tell ye only the good,
I do not speak falsehood."

Yes! He stresses the impossibility of realising God through religion and creed, and exhorts his opponents also to receive Divine Grace by adopting the Code of the Universal and Righteous Path which accepts all religions without reservation. What generosity!

Because his opponents adopted mean methods, Vallalar was saddened by these oppositions. He wished for revolution, but would not countenance strife. In the following lyric,

> "Like those devotees, who, ashamed of their ignorance of the often-sought scriptures,
> Immersed themselves in the ocean of delight,
> Witnessing the Lord's red feet that dance and whirl in the beautiful Hall,
> Though I too received God's Grace,
> I remained in seclusion so that the mortals may not be aware of it.
> Oh, Lord, the Cosmic Dancer!
> Alas! My heart is vexed to think of
> The fate that drew me out and made me suffer."

he reveals his inner disturbances that fate had drawn him into litigation and polemics, even though he wished to keep private the benign relationship between God and himself. We are deeply moved by this and let us read further his song of sorrow:

> "With the locks of hair, logged with Ganga, moving
> With the sacred form scintillating
> The feet that perform the Cosmic Dance
> Became one with my being and my mind.
> Though they frankly revealed me all
> I remained in seclusion, desiring
> That others should not know of it,
> Till I become one with the Lord.
> Oh, Lord, the Cosmic Dancer!
> Alas! My heart is vexed to think of
> The fate that drew me out and involved me in this.

The beauty of the sacred form,
So pleasing to our Goddess Sivakamavalli,
With hair as black as the clouds,

This wicked man as venemous as poison
Was blessed with grace to witness.
I wished to prolong the grace
In a manner not known to this world.

Oh, Lord, the Cosmic Dancer!
Alas! My heart is vexed to think of
The fate that conspired to draw me out by force,
To be scoffed at and scorned by the evil hearted."

Vallalar had composed ten songs in this manner. These sad songs which were occasioned by the way Monastic Heads and Pundits behaved with him, bring tears from our eyes, and we are also deeply disturbed at heart.

Tamil Nadu which caused such deep anguish to the Saint who came to redeem her, has neither salvation nor pardon!

Tamil Nadu has always offered sanctuary to false ascetics and made good souls to tremble. When will she ever reform! She who has received all the great seers, has put her own son to such deep anguish! To wash off this sin, let all of Tamil Nadu, in deep tears say "All Hail" to the Saint. That is the only way to redeem herself!

Saint Ramalinga received divine inculcation from God and became a seer. He preached to the people as the Divine Messaiah. Ramakrishna Paramahamsa says; "Though the sermons that come from divine men appear to be from humble people, they in truth come only from the kingdom of God." (*Sermons*)

Ramalinga Vallalar exemplified this utterance. Only those orthodox pundits, who did not understand this truth, disliked him. They had only their pride of learning. To be a great scholar in the scriptural and canonical writings is one thing; to be a seer blessed with the divine grace is another.

Paramahamsa says:

"The attempt to define God, after a mere study of the scriptures, is like describing Banaras (Kasi) to some one, after merely seeing it on a map." (*Sermons*)

Only people with the knowledge derived from canonical works. attempted to understand Vallalar,

Among the opponents of Vallalar, only the name of Arumuga Navalar is well-known to our generation. This is not because of his opposition to Vallalar, but because of his sterling service to the Tamil language and to the Tamils of Jaffna.

Rejoinder to Navalar

Citing the *Counter to the False Songs of Divine Grace*, we said earlier that the Monastic Chief of Thiruvavaduthurai was also connected with the movement opposing the *Songs of Divine Grace*. The work, *Ramalinga Pillai Paadal Aapaasa Tharpana Kandana Niyaaya Vachira Kudaram*: *The Strong Axe that Defends the Fairness of Condemning Ramalingam Pillai's Songs as Obscene Presentatation*, repudiates this:

"He (Navalar) wrote that His Holiness Subramania Desikar, the Head of the Thiruvavaduthurai Monastery met and argued with Ramalingam Pillai. This showed his ignorance of the prestige of the Thiruvavaduthurai Monastery. Not knowing that the Monastery was one with spiritual sway, more famous than the temporal ceremonies because of affluence, and that the Heads of the Monastery did not go on pilgrimage to places, according to their whims and fancies; and that these Heads never participated in debates, but were charitably disposed towards those who approached them, he (Navalar) involved the name of the Head of the Thiruvavaduthurai Monastery in this controversy. Even if Subramania Desikar had really debated with Ramalingam Pillai, as Navalar said, this would not have been left out in the account of pilgrimages, which was maintained in the Monastery."

Righteous Path Supporters

If a few opposed Vallalar, those who supported him were many. From work, *Niyaya Vachira Kudaram*, we know of the names, supporting Vallalar.

"Kancheepuram Sabapathy Mudaliar, Thiruthanigai Visaga Perumalayar, Ashtavadhanam Veerasamy Chettiar, Semangalam Narayana Mudaliar, Thirusirapuram Mahavidhwan Meenakshisundaram Pillai, Theevukkottai Muthuswamy Pillai, and a host of well-known scholars

and a number of chiefs of monastic establishments praised and respceted Vallalar greatly.

"And also Messrs. Somu Chettiar, Umapathy Mudaliar, Professor Velayudha Mudaliar, Subbaroya Chettiar, Shunmugam Pillai, and others of the priest-community in Chidambaram, and many Saivite hermits had great regard for Saint Ramalinga.

Apart from these, the great soul called Thandapani Swami also supported Saint Ramalinga. He met Vallalar at Vadaloor and had the pleasure of conversing with him as he desired a 'foreword' for one of his works. He had mentioned this in one of his books. Mayuram Vedhanayagam Pillai, the District Judge, had great regard for Vallalar. For a "Book of Homilies" that he published in 1859, he obtained a foreword from Vallalar.

Sent by God!

Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohamed and Gandhiji served mankind, considering themselves as messengers of God. People also believed and followed them as *Avatars* of God, and as prophets. Vallalar introduced himself as a messenger sent by God. He assured the people that they should trust him as "his words were the words of the Lord", thus:

"God ordained the advent of my birth in this epoch, only to reform the people of the world who are wicked inside, but appear to be good from outside, to enable them to achieve the Order of the Righteous Path and let them rejoice in their attainment of divinity from within."

Orthodox Saivites described this as "annoyance", 'No' says the Saint of Bengal, Shri. Ramakrishna:

"Great souls come down from spiritual heights for the benefit of men. At that time, they seem to have pride of learning. This pride is only external. It is like a line on water."

"Saint Sankara loved learning only for preaching to others."

"Though Saints like Naradha had attained supreme knowledge, there was arrogance in them. This was only to preach charity to the world."

(*Sermons*)

These golden sayings of Saint Paramahamsa enable us to understand Vallalar well.

See Everything through Divine Grace!

Saint Ramalinga was a true seer, having received an inner light from God. Therefore, he had the power to see everything through divine insight, without seeing through a common-awareness. He sings that the Spiritual Teacher who gave him this knowledge was the Almighty:

> "Oh, Supreme Lord, the spiritual mentor!
> Thou blessed me with the vision
> To see all actions in the light of grace".

In the lines, "without seeing anything through mere awareness, see with Divine Grace", Vallalar of the light of Divine Grace assures that he derived such a spiritual insight from God. Here, he emphasises the same idea that is found in a song by Saint Thayumanava:

> "Oh, dear girl!
> He asked me to see everything with grace.
> Not knowing it, I saw with my reason
> Except the dark
> I did not even see myself who saw."

Caste oriented monasteries

Vallalar sang, and preached, totally opposing and condemning the four-fold divisions of caste, and communal distinctions. Some Saivite monastic Heads and the orthodox religious scholars attached to them, did not relish this. This was because, all these Monasteries were orientad to caste, and they were administered, and the heads were elected on the same basis. Both during the time of Vallalar and even now, if there is a monastic head who keenly detests communal discriminations, and wishes to act free from such discriminations, in the administration of his monastery, he will be prevented from doing so by law as well as by tradition and convention.

Saint Ramalinga, hailing from a Saivite tradition, enjoyed an immense popularity among people of the Saivite religion, and he sang

condemning caste discriminations. We can understand why Monastic Heads, and orthodox religious scholars like Arumuga Navalar and Sabapathy Navalar who alligned themselves with these Heads and who themselves were Saivites belonging to the Vellala community, could not tolerate Vallalar. What is surprising is this: The communalists who encouraged such distinctions, did not show any open opposition to Vallalar for his condemnation of the four-fold instructions of caste!

This had thus surprised the orthodox religious pundits. That is why the *Counter to the False Songs of Divine Grace*, declares painfully:

"A person born of the priestly caste, who was fit to show obeisance to Saint Sankara by virtue of caste, religious tradition, education, etc., prostrated before Ramalingam Pillai and deemed and worshipped him as his spiritual teacher." We can know from Maraimalai Adigal's *Commund Discriminations and the False Saivites*, that the tyranny of difference, in observances of castes is not any the lesser than that of the orthodox discriminations of castes.

The Ignorance and Meanness of Caste

Vallalar composed verses in a language and in a manner which even the common man can understand, openly condemning discriminations in Religion, Caste and Creed and Community.

"Oh, my Spiritual Mentor!
Thou hast taught me
That those mythologies that speak of the four castes,
their codes and customs are puerile play.
And to realise that the colour of the skin
does not reflect high caste.

To manure the sterile fields with the rubbish
of the scriptural principle of the evil of caste,
To bury unto the earth futile codes of
confusing creeds and religions,
To let the fair Code of the Pure and
Righteous Path flourish,
Thou hast made me perform in the realm
of the Divine Light that leads to the Hall of Wisdom."

In these lyrics, he rebukes and ridicules religious divisions and orthodox discriminations of castes, and declares that they are meaningless.

A classification, we believe, with regard to orthodox divisions of castes and communal observances, will, enable us to understand the pure mind of Vallalar.

According to the scriptures, there are four divisions: the Brahmins, the Kings, the Traders and the Tillers. In Sanskrit, they are: the Brahmins (The Divine) the Kshatriyas (the Martial Race), the Vaisiyas (the Merchants), and the Sutras (the Low). Of the origin of these four, the Scriptures sang as follows:

"The Brahmins were born from the face of Brahma: the Kshatriyas from the shoulders; the Vaisiyas from the stomach, and the Sutras from the feet."

(*Yajur Veda*, 32:11)

The same idea is emphasised without change in the *Code of Manu* (Chapter 8, slogan 31), the *Ramayana* of Valmiki (*Aaranya* Canto, Chapter XIV).

As God is not human like us, we should hold that the birth of these four divisions as above are only from the imagination. Depicting society as Man, the importance of occupations appropriate to each caste was stressed, by associating each division of the castes with the various parts of the human body.

Communal Distinctions are Tamil's Own!

We may say that in the beginning, the four-fold-divisions of caste were created for the good of society. We come to know that in the Tamil Land of the Sangam Age, of 2000 years ago, there were the four-fold-divisions:

"Even among the four different castes
If one of the lower caste is learned
One of the higher caste will also seek him."

This utterance in *Puranaanooru* (No. 183) emphasises this. Even in the earlier *Tholkappiam*, there are references to the four-fold-divisions and their privileges. If we make a deep study of the literatures

of the Sangam Period, it may be evident that the four-fold-distinctions originated among the oldest citizens of India, namely, the ancient Tamils, who lived in the North, in Harappa and Mohenjadharo. The four-fold-divisions among the ancient Tamils originated as a result of their occupations and it was only a social institution to indicate the growth of their civilization. But, in the beginning, there could not have been any "superior"- "inferior", or "mean"-"noble" aspects to these divisions. As those were a latter-day introduction, Vallalar condemned them as evil.

Bharati who appeared after Vallalar, says this in his *Lyrics on Kannan* (*Kannan Paattu*). "The foolish people misused the system of castes. Those, good in conduct, thought and deed, are of the good caste. Divisions of high and low castes are instituted at birth, based on mere appearance. The false books, dividing people into castes, should be burnt for the good of all."

Gandhiji's Views

Gandhiji also supports the rationale for the origin of the four-fold-divisions, and appreciates their advantages. But he wishes for a casteless India, because, at a later time, the unjust attitudes of "high" and "low" which had intertwined themselves with the four-fold divisions, could not be eradicated.

"My view is that caste divisions were not created for any narrow objective. They served to give equal status to the worker that the *Sutra* was, and the thinker the Brahmin was, and to increase their importance and to eradicate their defects and drawbacks. Man's common aspirations from the mundane domain were transferred to the everlasting spiritual realm, by these four-fold-divisions.

At a later time, the lofty principles of the caste-divisions deteriorated into a mean condition. These caste-divisions consisted of meaningless ceremonies, and encouraged a few to think of themselves as superior, and to impute meanness to others."

(*The Collected Works of Gandhiji* Vol. 7, p. 73.)

"You must by all means take up arms against the monster called caste. In this regard, you will find me serving with you shoulder to shoulder."

(*Ibid.*, p. 79.)

That Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace remained a pioneer and a prophet in the struggle against the tyranny of caste-divisions is his special greatness. Even in those days, Vallalar deemed the four-fold-divisions meaningless. He exhorted that castes deal only with the external body and not with the soul.

The Rubbish of Commund Fanaticism.

Outside the four-fold-divisions, there are four thousand castes.

Bharati said that "the Hindus, more than any other peoples in the world, exhibit greater tyranny in observing caste-distinctions."
(*Bharati Essays*, p.46)

Gandhiji said that "caste tyrannies are prevalent more among the Tamils, than among the Hindus."

Vallalar, without specifying any particular religion, caste or community, had said that caste stands for "ignorance and "rubbish." He declares humously that this "rubbish" should be burnt and offered as manure to the land!

Caste in the Sangam Period.

The Orthodox Saivites who opposed Vallalar did not spare him from his caste. As though only those from a community or two could serve as religious heads, they attacked his caste and raised a doubt whether they could "accept" *Kanakku* (Accountant) Ramalingam *Pillai*",as Vallalar, and his *Songs* as (*Thiruarutpa.* (*Songs of Divine Grace.* (*Counter to the Songs of Divine Grace*, p.11). Communal hatred is evident in many pages of this publication. We desist, in shame, from citing them here.

The Tamil Race was unaware of caste discriminations. In the Sangam Period, there were castes, oriented to certain occupations. But there were no distinctions of the 'high' and the 'low' among them. Kapilar who was a Brahmin, and Paranan who was not a Brahmin lived as twin-brethren. Dhevanthi, born of the Brahmin community was a very dear friend of Kannagi, hailing from the Vaisiya community. And also, she became the priestess to perform the daily ablutions and to offer worship to the idol of Kannagi, in Vanchi! All the kings gathered at Vanchi, to offer worship to Goddess Kannagi and entreat from her divine favours.

If Vallalar, the incarnation of all arts, hated the caste-system and commndal orthodoxies, it was in tune with the Tamil tradition and not against it.

The Attack of Saint Appar!

Vallalar's opposition to the caste and communal differences, was not something that was against Saivism. Saint Appar, one of the Saivite chiefs asks:

"Ye wicked men who quote scriptures,
What will ye gain by traditions and castes?"

Vallalar poses the self-same question in a different form: "Is there a rule that those of the "low" communities should die and that those from the "high" communities (only) should live?" He answers "No" to this question, as follows:

"You divide people into high and low castes
You see that both die."

He did not also accept racial discriminations. If was Saint Thirunavukkarasu who depicted God both as Aryan and Tamil, as during his time, he was aware of Aryans and Tamils only! Had he lived to-day he would have described God not only as Aryan and Tamil, but also as European, Arabian and African. As such definition would be an insult to God, Saint Ramalinga, the good son of Lord Nataraja, humorously sings:

"Oh, Supreme Light Divine!
Whatever be the caste or class,
The eight foot grave
Measures the same for all."

Unattached to His Own Community.

Those who talk of eradication of castes, act at their own level, with communal attachment. But Vallalar, free from such communal attachment, preached eradication of castes to the peoples of the world.

The song,

"I discarded caste, creed and religion,
I also discarded the rubbish or scriptures."

emphasises this. And in,

"Oh, Supreme Light Divine!
Thou made me realise first of all
That caste, creed and religion are false.

Oh, True Being who transcends
the meanness of caste and creed.

Oh, Lord Unique!
Letting me discard caste, class and creed,
Thou uplifted me and blessed me with
the divine and incomparable nectar."

he declares that by divine grace, he had rooted out from his heart communal attachment. Perhaps, this is not possible for those who are not devoted to God, or who do not believe in such a thing!

His Clarion Call

Having put an end to the attachment to his own community, he preaches eradication of castes to the people thus:

"Ye people of the world!
From time immemorial,
Ye wallow fondly in
castes, creeds, religious codes,
scriptural debates and sectarian divisions.

It is not fair that ye should
wander thus and decay in vain.

I call ye all.
This is the moment,
The Lord Unique, He who dances
To bind ye to the just and righteous path,
Hath found it opportune
To manifest Himself and to play
in the realm of the Divine Light."

Vallalar wished to find a oneness among religions. He totally detested religious differences. We may declare boldly, that in the beginning, religions were born only to unite the people. When 'society was fragmented by linguistic regions, religion was he the only means to unite them. Even today, by race, a Tamil is related to three crores of Tamils. The rest of the peoples of the world become alien to him. But, it he happens to be a Hindu, he enjoys a spiritual kinship with over 3 crores of people. Similarly, a Tamil who is a Christian or a Muslim, is emotionally united, by virtue of the respective religion, to those in the continents of Europe, Africa and Arabia.

The Saint Sought a Golden Mean.

Languages and literatures, oriented to religion, were created to facilitate intercourse among communities. Religion was indeed not an axe to break up society. Much later, this became a divisive force. Owing to this, many religious strifes arose. On the one hand, it appears as an intellectual debate as a result of philosophy, and on the other, it arises as an armed struggle as a result of power aggrandisement Vallalar hated either struggle. He was deeply hurt and disturbed by the absence of impartiality among religionists. Here is a poem dilineating his pain:

"Mother, Oh, Mine!
For ever-so-many-days,
grace never reached those crowds
that had no sense of justice or fairness,
And whenever I saw the evil
and the mean minded who misused power
and the heinous who spoke nothing but untruth,
I was disturbed at heart.
I was alarmed to see the way of the world,
discarding the Pure and Righteous Path."

The Saint in Agony!

As religious quarrels abounded in the world, he sang as though all religions should go:

"Oh, Lord who took me as Thy son!
Thou revealed to me that

The crowds of religions gathered
with corporate movtives of plunder.
The scriptures porclaimed by these crowds,
The scenes and stages showed by these
deceptive scriptures,

And the Gods who present the scenes,

Are all but puerile play.

Let all the paths that lead to delusion
be burried unto earth."

Though religions fought against one another, they had a common aim among themselves. That is, to *rob the people* Hence he attacks religion as "crowds of religions gathered with corporate motives of plunder". Vallalar does not really attack religion, but the tyranny of the people being robbed in the name of religion.

Ye Great Men!

Apart from hating religious and communal discriminations, Vallalar also hated scriptural and sectarian distinctions. He addresses those "greatmen" who disliked and opposed him thus:

" Citing false scriptures of existing religions
And making strong gestures with your hand,
Ye cry aloud, ' My God, My God only!'
Ye are not aware that God is one,
Ye great men and staunch fanatics of religion!"

Without hating those who hated him, he invites them as follows:

"What will ye do if this body made of
the five elements decays?

Ye do not know the ways of making
this mortal body immortal.

The hour when my Unique Father
shall redeem ye has come

Come over and attain bliss."

Why did Vallalar hate religious, communal and caste differences? We should think that his intention was to seek a unity among them. The Saint wished to see in his own life-time, a unity among religions. For this, he founded a separate movement and called it "Universal and Righteous Path". It's mottto was "All religions are acceptable!" Without interpreting Vallalar's poems, which oppose religion, word by word, readers should understand that he considerd all religions acceptable.

Scriptures Liked and Disliked!

As the sage of Vadaloor was greatly proficient in Sanskrit, he knew well its scriptures and canons. He says that God had taught him as his spiritual mentor scriptural and canonical works and their inner meanings, thus:

" Thou showed me the subtleties and intricacies
Of the codes of scriptures and the canons.
The code proclaimed, by the ancient mythologies,
And the codes prescribed, by the epics,
Thou made me learn them as they are."

Those who believe in the Saint as one who received divine insight should also believe this. The Saint's "Order of the Universal and Righteous Path" is interpreted by his principal disciple, Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar, thus: It is an Order that establishes in the world the seminal idea of universal brotherhood, and spreads the true teachings of the scriptures." (*Publication of the Order of the Uuniversal' Pure and Righteous Path*, Madras, Books I to V, *The Thiruarutpa* p.4.)

In his *Ode on Supreme Light Divine*, Vallalar sang:

" Oh, Supreme Light Divine!
Thou art infinite,
Crowning the canons and the scriptures.
Oh, Supreme Light Divine!
Thou art the source,
The basis of scriptures and canons."

Thus the Saint revealed his attachment to the tenets of scriptures.

Yes. The Saint disliked such scriptures which were selfishly exploited by orthodox circles, and liked those scriptural tenets praised by seers:

"The orthodox who interpret
scriptures, canons, mythologies and epics first
and the works on the illusory senses last
Know that only erotic work is deception
My son, know Ye that all these are deceptions."

The Saint who speaks of his having received divine insight, declares in the next lyric that God gave him this grace in order to over-master him:

"I told ye that the extent scriptures are deceptions.
If ye know that scriptural expositions and literatures
are false,
Ye will find the truth of eternal scriptures,
And ye will realise that the scriptures
known to this world are untrue."

Differences among Scriptures

The differences which Vallalar had pointed out in scriptural and cononical works, were also pointed out by a number of other seers. Vallalar's contemperorary, Swami Dhayanandha Saraswati refuted scriptural expositions and wrote an independent work called *Sathyartha Prakash*. He and the members of his *Arya Samaj* totally repudiated scriptural expositions and mythologies.

Similarly, Rajaram Mohan Roy founded the *Brahma Samaj* only because the ancient scriptural works and expositions did not serve for providing equal justice to all the four castes. He preached against those expositions which dealt with ideas contrary to the basic tenets of the scriptures.

Also, there is a prevalent thought that there is a fundamental difference between those scriptures which are believed to be created by God, and those that are followed today

"Scriptures point only to truth. They are boundless. There is none who has fully understood them. Those that exist today in the name of scriptures fade into insignificance when compared to the true ones."

(*The Collected works of Gandhi.*, *Vol. VII*, *p*.57)

These are the views of Gandhiji. Bharati has this to say on scriptures:

The Lord revealed the scriptures,
But they are not in the language of humans.
There is no truth in the bunch of stories
that these people call scriptures.
Only a little of His scriptures
is found in the so called scriptures.

Seers, irrespective of where and when they are born, speak the same "language". Only, we do not understand it. Besides, learning what is said, we pay attention to their caste first and so we do not hear what the seers say.

There was enlightenment in the realm of religion from the beginning of the 19th century. The service of illuminating old scriptures, expositions, and legends, begins in Tamil Nadu, with Vallalar.

Only because the orthodox Saivites did not understand this truth, they waged a war against him. Vallalar addresses them as follows:

" Ye engage in futile debates about scriptures and canons
Ye do not know their real significance.
Of what use they are,
If they can not reveal the truth but allude subtly.
Scriptures do speak only confusions,
But can not give a real vision like our eyes do.
I realised and witnessed to my joy,
The true vision, the beautiful form of divine grace
Of the Lord of Chidambram."

Vallalar did not ideologically regret the tenets and canons of scriptures; he did not approve of the way in which they were used. However, he did not antagonize either the Brahmin community or the temple-priests of Chidambaram, because of his dislike for scriptures and canons. As he desired Spiritual love and Universal Brotherhood, he showed kindness to them also. As Gandhiji would do, he did not dislike individuals, but he hated their mistakes.

As Vallalar was deeply read in Sanskrit, many orthodox Brahmins studied Sanskrit works under his tutelege, when he lived in Cuddalore and Chidambaram.

Just because a few, like Arumuga Navalar, from the Vellala community, were in the forefront in their opposition to the *Songs of Divine Grace*, he did not show any animus to that community, A number of those belonging to Brahmin and Pillai communities, showed very profound respect to Vallalar, even when there was a fierce opposition to him.

The "*Niyaya Vachira Kudaram* says, "To this day the Saiva Vellalas of Manjakkuppam and other places have a deep love for Ramalingam Pillai."

Those, opposing Navalar, and supporting Vallalar, were also in Jaffna, during Vallalar's time. This is revealed in a book *Arumuga Navalar Prabhanda Thiratu*, (*A Compendium*), published by Navalar's relative, Thiru. Kailasa Pillai.

Therefore, we can not blame any particular community for the opposition to Vallalar. Vallalar also did not communally blame any one in his verses, prose-writings and letters to his friends. Those who upported him and opposed him were from among all communities.

We can not say that all those Saivites and the temple-priests of Chidambaram who stood by Vallalar, accepted his socio-religious ideas of reform, as they were. There were those who followed him for his moral character, lofty qualities, pure devotion to God, and deep erudition.

We said earlier that the region between Chidambaram and Madras was the battle-ground for the resistance to Vallalar's Order of

the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path. But the battle-ground has not been stilled yet, even after the disappearance of the Saint. The battle was to be enlarged, and we shall revert back to this region again, and for the nonce we will leave it.

During the time the opponents of The *Songs of Divine Grace* were waging a war of ideas againts its supporters, our Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace, senenely devoting himself to God, taught others the precepts of Godly devotion, at Siddhivalagam (Abode of Spiritual Attainment) in Mettukkuppam.

Let us also listen to his devotional discourses at Siddhivalagam.

XI

SERMONS FROM SIDDHIVALAGAM

Vallalar established an *Abode of Spiritual Attainment*, *Siddhivalagam*, in Mettukkuppam, at a distance of two miles from Vadaloor. He made it his place of residence and also a temple for the worship of God in the form of *Supreme Light Divine* and *Supreme Love Divine*. It was a school for initiating his followers, and also a forum for the Saint to debate with savants who differed in thought from him.

Wardha and Vadaloor

We found that after Gandhiji established a hermitage at a small hamlet called *Wardha*, it became a place of sacred pilgrimage for scholars and political leaders. A century before, *Siddhivalagam* of Mettukkuppam also was equally renowned. After Vallalar settled there, great scholars, Monastic Heads, Saivite pundits of scriptures, high ranking officers, and the like gathered at Siddhivalagam to have *darshan* of the Saint. Many among them bought plots, constructed houses and settled with their families in the villages of Vadaloor and Mettukkuppam, as they desired to have *darshan* of the Saint often, and worship God, daily along with him, and listen to his discourses.

Vallalar lit a sacred lamp in *Siddhivalagam*. He deemed the light as divine light and worshipped it, alone, and sometimes with his followers. Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar who was fortunate to see that sight, remarks: "A large assembly of many communities gathered round the Saint."

Saint Ramalinga did not like people to be unreasonably attached to him. To those who sought his permission to settle in Vadaloor, he declined to grant it, on some pretext or other. Despite the ban imposed by him, his followers, came, one family after another, and settled in Vadaloor.

The Glory of the Hut!

Siddhivalagam, established by Vallalar, flourished with the Grace of Divine Light. How to describe the glory of the hut when even God who had ever-mastered him graced the hut with his arrival!

" Though Brahma, Vishnu and other Lords of Heaven
Did penance for days together and entreated Thee
To grace with Thy Holy Feet,
The crystal seat with the bed of honeyed flowers,
In the midst of the beautiful Hall,
Thou entered on Thy own Will
The hut where I am in
And not only gave me the holy nectar of grace,
Thou wert also pleased to enter the house of flesh,
The heart of this humble servant.

Though Thou pervade all the world as Thou art,
In the form of radiant light without any obstruction
in the midst of the vast space,
With Thy flower-like feet seated on the great literary
stage crowned with naturally flourishing
scriptures,

Being made red
Thou entered my thought.
Oh, Lord, is it not enough that Thou
wert pleased to give me bliss in abundance?
Thou also entered lovingly
the hut of this wretched being."

In the above lyric, the true savant and Saint declares that the radiant light of God not only suffused his mind but also entered the hut that was the abode of his physical body!

Worldly Life and Divine Life

The teachings of the Saint from *Siddhivalagam* remind us of the teachings of Buddha which he delivered to his disciples, sitting under the *Bodhi* tree. When we drink delight from the divine utterances of the Saint, sages like Agasthiya and Valmiki are brought before our mind's eye. A poet, experienced like us, sings as follows:

"Oh, Ramalinga of rare intellect!
Art thou the sage Agasthiya or Valmiki
or Adhisesha himself?
Art thou the great saint Gnanasambanda,
Or the Divine Grace of Eternal Bliss shining from within?
Oh, what shall I call Thee?"

Vallalar, like the Saints Thayumanava, Pattinathar, and Arunagiri, did not stop with preaching the divine life, but taught his followers the codes of moral conduct in worldly life. In these lines:

"Being of my being, Thou art
Suffusing my consciousness
Thou revealed and taught me
The worldly life and the divine life at the same time,"

he speaks of God having exhorted him to involve himself in this twin-service.

Sermons to the Devotees

While endeavouring to inculcate Divine Grace, Vallalar points out the first step to Final Bliss:

"To realize God, our Lord, the Key of His Grace is required. Such Grace is obtained only through Love."

"This love is realized only through compassion to all living beings."

"The gains of compassion is love."

"Conducting oneself without harm to other living beings is compassion. This is the first step to the Final Bliss."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4,p.16.)

Our divine teacher also refers to the means to achieve the Final Bliss:

"As the human body, and not any other body, is the most suitable for attaining Salvation, the body should be protected by all means to let it last long."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p.17.)

The golden saying of Ramalinga Vallalar of Divine Light Grace, reminds us of the song of Thirumoolar:

"I deemed the body a disgrace once,
I then found in it life's essence.
As God resides in the body,
I take extreme care of it."

"God is bountiful to all living beings. Therefore, he is Almighty. Similarly, he will make us show compassion to all living beings and enable us to receive all powers."

"Whosoever is bountiful in compassion, imbibes God in himself. Those who have no compassion cannot imbibe God in themselves; though they may have the divine in themselves, we must always love God and be devoted to Him."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p.65.)

"Devotion to God means the awareness of the manifestation of God in all living beings."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p.61.)

Thus Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace teaches the glory of the path of devotion.

The Four Evils

Vallalar, taught that God is found in all living beings and that each one should realize Him from within. He advised that the body

should be taken care of as the first step, and warned us by citing the "fourevils" that destory the body's welfare, as follows:

"Food, sexual union, sleep and fear are the four (evils) that make us lose, and we should be very careful about them."

"Of the four, we must be extremely careful about two: food and sexual union. Of the two, the most important is sexual union. We must be most careful about this. If not so, the body will be spoiled very soon. Afterwards, no salvation is possible."

(B.K. Pillai, V.4, pp.16-17.)

To make the body last, Saint Ramalinga makes mention of regulations in eating and of care through medicine. It was his firm belief that man could be immortal.

Religion is needless!

"Our forefathers made religion a means for realizing God. But those means became obstacles for reaching God's grace", said Vallalar: "Religions were created in accordance with philosophic principles. The creation of religions and castes prevents the growth of compassion. Unless a common outlook is ushered in by the abolition of these, kindness to all living beings will not flourish for receiving the Grace of God and attaining the Supernatural Powers of Bliss."

If it is true that "God suffuses all lives", then it should be true that those who contribute to differences and enimical feelings, owing to castes and creeds, can not receive God's Grace.

The Saint's teachings at *Siddhivalagam* were larded with ideas of socio-religious reforms. As Saint Ramalinga spoke directly to the followers of the Righteous Path, he explained the truths behind the imaginative stories of mythologies the meanings of which only seers knew, and which were hidden from the people.

"The battle with Soorapadhma" (a demon) implies conquering of the senses. The purport of the ride of Subramanya and Ganesha, respectively on the peacock and the rat, is different. To take those deities out on processions, without knowing the purport, indicates ignorance."

(B.K. Pillai, V.4, p.63.)

"The 63 saints referred to in the *Periyapurana* are only philosophic truths. If they are followed, after an enquiry, each one will give an intrinsic power."

"Similarly, the truths imbedded in the *Shiva* and *Vishnupuranas* deal with the conquering of the senses."

"The hagiographies of saints like Manickavasaka deal only with their spiritual powers. Their sacred verses were named after them respectively, and temples were built as seats of their devotional songs and were dedicated to the Gods and Goddesses representing the spiritual powers so attained by them. It became customary to commemorate the time of the fruition of such powers with special observances daily."

"In the same way, mythologies like *Thiruvilayadal, Bharatabaghavathas* should be interpreted."

"The Gods, Ganapathy and Subramanya represent only philosophic truths. The heart of mythologies (about Gods) consists in conquerring the faculties."

(B.K. Pillai, V.4, pp. 2 - 3.)

Mythologies are only Philosophic Ideals!

Vallalar's incomplete ideas on mythologies, as found above, may cause a confusion among those who are deeply attached to mythologies from which they derive benefits. Vallalar declared that the ideas on the imaginative stories of mythologies would be published in detail in "*The Pure and Righteous Path.*" But such a publication did not see the light of day. If that work had been published, we could have received such truths which would be accepted even by mythologists. As we have lost this opportunity, we should believe that the Saint's ideas on mythologies were not conceived fully.

All mythological stories can not be fully held as truthful history or be considered wholly imaginative. It is likely that some stories are based on history, and some others, on imagination. Even if it is possible to distinguish and separate the historical and the imaginative, the orthodox do not allow it. Therefore, the superstition of looking upon the imaginative as historical has come to stay among the people. It is natural for laymen to believe imagined happenings

as historical ones. But could not atleast those educated in philosophy remain an exception! A large majority of them believe mythological stories as true historical occurrences.

"God is given various names and apportioned to sacred habitats and given symbolic carriages, weapons, shapes and forms, in human terms, which are declared to be true."

"To those who ask," "Are there hands and legs for Gods?", there is no proper reply. Even the so called "wisemen" of earlier and later times, not being aware of what is true, blindly declared these Gods to be true. But the one who first began hiding the truth about God was an able man. What he hid, none to this day has found out, and none to this day has come forward to repudiate these accounts of Gods." (B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p. 133.)

Thus says Vallalar. Saint Ramalinga had considered mythologies as treasure-chests of philosophic truths. Like today's reformers, he did not declare that "all mythologies should be consigned to the fire." According to his views, all mythologies are philosophic riches. What Saint Ramalinga condemns are not the mythologies, but the stupidity in believing the imaginative accounts to be true, and failing to understand the philosophic truths.

While preaching about the methods of worshipping God, Saint Ramalinga says as follows:

"The centre between the brows is the station of the wakeful state, the supreme illumination of the soul. As such, the top of the nose at the centre of the brows is especially significant."

"It is advisable that with the guidance of a teacher, we get to have our "central eye" in the forehand opened. To one who has had this eye opened, all experiences will appear crystal clear. He also is the Pure Seer."

"To open this eye, above mentioned, there is a lock and a key. The lock should be opened, with the key of divine grace. Such grace is the natural quality of the Spirit which is infinite compassion; if we are suffused with it, the experience described above will occur."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p. 38.)

The Closed Central Eye!

The sermon of the Saint at Siddhivalagam that there is a spiritual eye between the brows in the human face and that one who opens it with the help of a teacher is alone a seer, is confirmed by some of his verses:

"Contemplate constantly to open the spiritual eye between the two brows.
Letting it open, experience bliss."

"The Lord Unique and the Cosmic Dancer, worshipped by all the Lords,
Was between my brows
At an innocent age when I was not aware of sensual pleasures.
I did not see him afterwards."

"Oh, Light of Camphor radiating between the brows,
Without glazing the eye with the mist of illusion."

Saint Ramalinga's preachings only confirm the mythical account of Lord Shiva's "Central eye." Perhaps, to indicate from where God emanates as light or "Supreme Knowledge", the men and women of our land follow the time honoured wearing, respectively a sandal mark and a *Kumkum*, on their foreheads!

"The eye, being hidden, as described above, is significant because of the spiritual illumination. The above space (between the brows) is variously referred to as the seminal spot, place of wisdom, central space, place of triple-illumination, base of the triple junction, he zenith, centre of the brows and the organs of the Hall of Wisdom." (B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p.35.)

To get this spiritual eye opened, meditation is indispensable.

"To medidate, we should contemplate on an image. The mind should not remain blank. Only when a form is contemplated, it becomes formless. The dual becomes one. Anulment of the self is becoming one. The anulment of the form contemplated is the exalted truth."

"If you want to see yourselves, see me. If you want to see me, see yourselves. If you see yourselves, you will see me, and if you see me, you will see yourselves."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p.114.)

said the Saint. The meaning of this sermon is borne out by his seeing the image of Lord Muruga on the looking glass, even in his childhood days. Saint Ramalinga preaches that "a genuine desire to see God is an intensely tearful experience. That is the time we are above the basic demands of hunger!"

Yoga is Not Needed

Attaining a state of trance, forgetting ourselves, in thoughts devoted to God, is one kind of meditation. That is also called *yoga.* But Saint Ramalinga does not advise the common folk to follow such a *yoga.*

"The spirit of the age does not conduce you to follow *yoga* and other means. Therefore, keep *prayer* alone as a path of salvation."

The mind should constantly devote itself to repeating the name of Lord Shiva. We must so see to it that the world is suffused with divine, material, creative, meditative and spiritual powers. Yoga need not be practised: Once absorbed in it, it is difficult to come out of it. To come out of a constant communion with Shiva is also rare. Dimension will occur. This is true."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p.114.)

Thus preached Saint Ramalinga to the devotees gathered before him at *Siddhivalagam.* Also, he declared: "The habit of attaining a state of trance is not a habit at all. Only a habit of amity and friendliness is the right habit."

It is the preaching of the Saint that even those who do not wish to be all-seeingseers (with the help of their central eye), should be devoted to Lord Shiva in their daily life.

"Except during the time of our answering calls of nature, we should at all other times, love God, and show kind devotion to living beings. Devotion, especially to God, is to do with a deep emo-

tional intensity and sympathy and with the awareness that God manifests himself in all "living beings."

Let the Whole World Live!

Among those in the 20th century, who exemplified the glory of prayer to the people, Gandhiji is pre-emient. Even today, the habit of praying for one's own good is prevalent among men. But Gandhiji taught people to pray to God for the welfare of the whole world, shedding their selfishness. Saint Ramalinga preaches as follows:

"It is not proper that man devotes himself to prayer only for himself. He should so pray as to wish for all the world to live. If he does so, he has all that he wishes for."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p. 112.)

In the following hymn, Saint Ramalinga invites those who had gathered at Siddhivalagam, to pray along with him:

Thinking constantly, feeling intensely,
Melting in devotion and full of love,
The body drenched in welling tears,
I supplicate the Lord, ever extoling Him.
Oh, Nectar of Grace, Treasure of Goodness, Cosmic Dancer, my very own Lord!
Come, Ye people of the world!
Ye shall live a life sans death.
Invent I do not,
Lie I do not,
I state but the truth.
This is the time to attain bliss and beatitude."

The Saint taught the means of praying for the welfare of the world, together with one's own family or with the people of the locality, without praying for one's own welfare. It was only for inculcating the method of joint-prayer that the Temple of Truth and Wisdom was established at Vadaloor.

The Tamils of the Sangam Age

The Tamils of the Sangam Age had worshipped God together. Verses in *Silappathikaram* also indicate this.

Kamban's utterance, "*We* surrender to the Lord", in his *Ramayana* is also worthwhile noting here.

The Vaishnavite Saint Nammazhvar says, "If we worship together, the Age is free from darkness." Saint Nammazhvar believed that corporate worship enabled the eradication of the wicked spirit of the times and the introduction of good for the society. Vallalar also had noted in his sermons:

"The evil influence of the Bad Spirit of this Dark Age, all over the world, will disappear in ten years." Vallalar was hopeful that the corporate worship that he had enunciated would spread throughout the world and because of it, the ills of the Dark Age would be put an end to.

The Voice of the Successor

Saint Ramalinga should have been attracted by the mass-prayer of Muslims and Christians. He emphasized the corporate method for which he brought out four petitions in prose (to the Lord), according to the Code of the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path.

The Petition of Truth,
The Great Petition of Truth,
The Petition of Wisdom and Truth, and
The Mini Petition of Truth.

Bharati, the successor to Vallalar, says: "If the Hindus worship jointly, with a proper awareness of the meaning of scriptures, then the Age of Darkness will disappear."

Our ancestors established temples with a view to providing opportunities for the integration of the human mind in corporate worship and for the understanding of the spiritual unity among men. To promote national integration also, corporate worship is an excellent means. Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood underlies the preachings of the Saint at Siddhivalagam.

The God of Man!

Saint Ramalinga declared to everyone who met him that man's only aim should be to receive Divine Grace from God. He preaches this through his letters also.

"We have attained this superior human birth, after many births, only for receiving the Divine Grace of Lord Shiva. Attain this Grace we should by whatever endeavour on our part. We shall come by this Grace only by our compassion to all living beings, our detachment to wordly life, and our unchanging love for Shiva. We shall also receive it and be in great bliss. This is the truth. Only meditation is very important hereafter. So we should ever meditate with a pure heart."

"Hail to Lord Shiva!
Did I do penance?
I had divine intimations of the holy name of Lord Shiva.
Danger never there is,
For those who think of the holy name of Lord Shiva.
What good deed did I do
To be fortunate to extol with this fleshly tongue,
The holy name of Lord Shiva?"

"If you meditate, with an understanding of this hymn, then everything will be evident."

"This should not be read out to others."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 5, pp.31-32.)

This is the preaching of Saint Ramalinga to Irukkam Rathina Mudaliar through a letter to him. The hymn beginning with the line, "Did I do penance?" is in *Thiruvasagam.* The hymn which begins with "Danger never there is" is in Avvaiyar's *Nalvazhi*: (*The Good Path*). The line beginning with "What good deed did I do" is in the Saint's *Thiruarutpa* (*Songs of Divine Grace*). Though Saint Ramalinga had composed thousands of verses, his citing his predecessors, Avvaiyar and Manickavasaka, for invocation of God, while praying, indicates his love for them.

As it is not easy to attain the ability to steep oneself in meditation by the control of the mind, a training for it should be had from proper ascetics. If this is not possible, it is enough if one utters the five-syllabled watch-word "*Namasivaya*". So declares Vallalar:

"To experience the infinite spirit of Shiva, compassion to living beings, determined love, and devotion to Shiva are chiefly required. An acquaintance with ascetics is the first means required for acquiring these. This is good. Whether we get their acquaintance or no in the present time, it is most important that we should ever be supplicating at the feet of Lord Shiva and constantly invoking the holy name of the Lord of the Five Syllables, who has brought us ashore to this beatitude, getting us across the Seven Vast Seas of Birth."

(B. K. Pillai, V.5, p. 14.)

The Four Disciplines

The Saint taught the disciplines that man should follow in his daily life. They are:

1. The Discipline of the Senses.
2. The Discipline of the Faculties.
3. The Discipline of Life, and
4. The Discipline of the Spirit.

1. The Discipline of the Senses

The discipline of the perception of the senses consists of: Listening intently to the sounds of songs of prayer and not other sounds, avoidance of hearing harsh words, keeping away from uncleanliness, shunning cruel sights, not caring for the tastes of the palate, and not liking perfumes. The discipline of action of the senses consists of: Speaking kind words, not uttering falsehood, prevention by all means of cruelty to living beings, going to wise-men, that is acquainting with ascetics, going about doing service to all living beings, serving them manually, regulating calls of nature with proper medical, diateric and physical care.

2. The Discipline of the Faculties: This consists of: Concentrating one's attention upon the (station of the) Hall of Wisdom, (between the brows), without being distracted by other aberrations, not inspecting the defects

of other people, discarding egoism, eschewing the defects which are unnaturally created, and becoming one with the Spirit of Nature, not being angry with others, condemning one's own adverse faculties, and not having deviant sexual relationships.

3. The Discipline of Life

This consists of: Standing by oneself in relationship to others, with out (observing) the differences of caste, creed, community, sect, orthodoxy, scripture, country, means feelings of superiority and inferiority, etc.

4. The Discipline of the Spirit

This consists of: Showing sympathy to the countless number of souls of the various species, and treating the Soul as the Divine Hall and its Inner Light as the Lord, existing in supreme oneness and perfection. Besides these four codes, Vallalar also emphasises other observances:

"Following these disciplines as far as possible, we should constantly endeavour to and acquaint ourselves with doing such good deeds, as being in solitude, enjoying without desire, extoling God, showing compassion to other living beings, imbibing noble qualities, supplicating in prayer, and being devout."

The Revolution that Shook!

Among the sermons of the Saint from Siddhivalagam, the revolutionary saying which would shook the Saivites and Vaishnavites are as follows:

"Do not hold in esteem the Saivite and Vaishnavite religions, and the philosophies of Vedhanta and Siddhanta. They refer to God only in general terms, not explicitly."

"I had at the beginning boundless respect for the Saivite religion. Do you see how it is gone now! The proof for my respect are my hymns contained in the *Songs of Divine Grace* (*Thiruarutpa*) and nothing else. If those hymns and those by others are brought to this forum, they will themselves stand witness. If I was then so deeply

involved (with Saivism) it was because I had very little knowledge then."
(B. K. Pillai, V. 4, p. 135.)

Saint Ramalinga refers only to the first four canons as the *Thiruarutpa*: *the Songs of Divine Grace*, as the other two canons were not printed during his life time.

The Saint's Utterance?

Thiru A. Balakrishna Pillai, Editor of the *Songs of Divine Grace*, doubts whether this sermon could be attributed to the Saint. He cites the following reason in his preface to the sermon-section of *the Songs of Divine Grace*.

"A major portion of the sermon-section is notes written by the followers of the Saint, from his oral preachings at the House of Charity in Vadaloor, and Siddhivalagam in Mettukkuppam.

It is not easy to know where and when the original form of his utterances had been changed, owing to the imperfections of the knowledge of the writers and the listeners, of their desire to twist, or mistakes in writing.

However all practitioners of the Righteous Path should become aware of the original meaning of his preachings only by what had been published in the sacred pages of the Saint's prayers and utterances."

The Saint's Utterance Indeed!

We should bear in mind the warning of Thiru. Pillai. But we should believe that what Mr. Pillai hesitates to accept as the Saint's views to be really his preaching. His preaching people "not to hold in esteem the Saivite and Vaishnavite religions and the philosophies of Vedhanta and Siddhanta" is found also in the "Great and Truthful Petition of the order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path."

"Thou actually taught me that such widespread religions as Saivism, Vaishnavism, Jainism and Buddhism, and such means, Gods and ends, indicated by them were diversities of spiritual attainments and that such scriptures, canons, mythologies and traditional writings of these religions were only creations of the imagination. Thou wert pleased to prevent me from observing these even to a small extent."

"Thou also taught me that such multi-dimensioned creeds and paths, variously called Vedhanta, Siddhanta, Bhodanta, Nadanta, Yoganta and Kalanta were attainments different from the experience of the Pure and Righteous Path, and prevented me from following them."

(B. K. Pillai, V. 2, p.127.)

(The text, written in the Saint's own hand, is still preserved.)

It is worthwhile noting here that the section cited above from the **Great and Truthful Petition**, agrees with the ideas that the Saint preached at Siddhivalagam. The following lyric from the *Songs of Divine Grace* strengthens the Saint's declaration that he had "very little knowledge when he was involved so deeply with Saivism."

"Confused I was by talks of
Religion, Creed, Scriptures,
The immortal beings, the world of these divine beings,
And the experiences of the devotees who reach this immortal world.
Thou openly revealed me all, oh, God Gracious!
Oh, Lord, Thou who dance uniquely
In the Hall of the Pure and Righteous Path of Eternal Unity!
Deign to wear my garland of verses."

In these lines the Saint declares that God, resolving his confusions when he was in the belief that religions like Saivism were true, and initiated him into the Code of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path of All Religions.

Saivism is Not a Religion!

It appears that Saint Ramalinga considered "Saivism" to be different from the "Saivite Religion."

The principle of "Saivism" which lets the life to be a vessal of the divine soul that is "Shiva", should have been agreeable to the Saint. Religion is one thing. Religious principle is another. Saint Ramalinga loved and respected the principle of Saivism right from his

childhood days till the end of his life. That is why he sings of the Cosmic Dancer, to the great delight of the true Saivites, thus:

"Oh, Lord of Lords,
Thou who dance to establish True Wisdom
and let it flourish in the world!
Won't your feet pain?"

He declares elatedly in the *"Lay on Lord Shunmuga."*

"He was called Gnanasambandha.
He flourished to nourish Saivism.
He will not reside in false hearts.
Praise the golden feet of that Saint
Oh, Dear Girls!"

and that Lord Shunmuga incarnated himself as Saint Gnanasambanda for protecting Saivism. It is appropriate to remember here that the song cited above is found in the Sixth Canon.

Towards Universalism

Saint Ramalinga did not dislike the philosophies of Vedhanta and Siddhanta. His songs in the Sixth Canon are proof for this.

The lines: "Oh, dear girl!
God can not be contained in Substance,
Only by means of which He binds us with Him,"

are an exhortation to those "tigers" of Vedhanta - Siddhanta philosophies, who attempt to shut God into the crucible of their philosophies and to those "cyphers" who detest philosophic knowledge. Lines as these,

"Oh, dear girl!
Witness I should the dance
That unites the philosophies of Vedhanta and Siddhanta.
Walk will ye the holy realm of Vedhanta?
And cross will ye my path without walking so?
Will there be harmony between Vedhanta and Siddhanta?

Will the radiant light of pure knowledge suffuse the vast space?

What is the divine will of the Lord who dances at the centre of the Universe?

The fragrance of the holy ash wafting from his head to foot I do not know."

in the *Songs of Divine Grace* reveal the Saint's love for pure philosophies of Siddhanta and Vedhanta. He emphasises an agreement and a unity between these two philosophies of Siddhanta and Vedhanta.

In the Path of Saint Thayumanava

Vedhantic expert that Swami Vivekananda was, he declared that Vedhanta was not a separate religion. Vallalar considers Siddhanta also in a similar manner. He therefore sings thus:

"Supreme Light Divine!
The lofty Hall of Wisdom is the vast grand space of pure Vedhanta

Supreme Light Divine!
The unique Hall of Wisdom is the vast blissful space of pure Siddhanta."

That Saint Thayumanava also desired a unity between the Vedhanta - Siddhanta philosophies is evident from the utterance, "Oh, band of wise-seers who have attained the desirable state of unity between Vedhanta and Siddhanta!" It is difficult for those who are either deeply attached to religion, or who hate it, to understand the mind of Saint Ramalinga. If we study his sermons, keeping in mind only the devotion to God, and disregarding all other interests, it will be evident that he has not said anything against the code of Saivism.

The Universal, Pure and Righteous Path that Saint Ramalinga emphasised imbibes in itself the righteous codes of all other religions. This is evident from his utterance: "The Experience of the Pure and Righteous Path is not the same as that of attributes, non-attributes, significations and ideals of religions. The Pure and Righteous Path is not the same as the above mentioned religions, but embraces them."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p.47.)

Sleep

Ramalinga Vallalar preached at Siddhivalagam exclusively for the members of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path. We knew earlier that he had divided the Righteous Path Seekers into two categories; the attainers and the practitioners. Many of his sermons are common to both. A number of them are only for one group, according to their individual attainment. There are also sermons that would be commonly useful to all the people. With this in mind, let us examine further the sermons that the Saint preached.

He preached to the attainers and the practitioners, about food, sleep, sexual indulgence, child-birth etc.

"A person should very carefully protect himself. Otherwise, he will quickly die. This is certain."

"The life-span will increase, if one sleeps less. If a person learns to sleep for an hour a day, he will live for a thousand years."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p.67.)

"Except for relaxing in bed for a short while, after lunch, one should not attend to other matters. There should be no sleep under any circumstance during day."

"One should not remain at night in an unlighted place. This will reduce life-span. We should light our homes and drive darkness away and remain happily without sleep. If we do so, life-span will increase. This is for the attainers."

"The practitioners should sleep in a particular manner. Just as a lighted lamp in a home takes in all the darkness, if the light of life that we are, does not shine above, then we, the radiant light of life, take in the darkness and suffer. Similarly, if our body which is the abode of the soul, remains in the darkness of spiritual ignorance, there will be a quick reduction of life."

Child Birth

Saint Ramalinga permitted Righteous Path Seekers to live a domestic life, with their wives. As these mature "attainers" would always be devoted to thoughts of Lord Shiva, they might not be

inclined towards sexual indulgence. However, they may be solely inclined to sexual pleasure. For them he has the following advice:

"In the sac of the testes, there is a triple knobbed cluster on the right, and another of four on the left. If the sperms mix at the time of pregnancy in the triple knobbed cluster the male is born, and if they do in the cluster of four, the female is born. When sexual union takes place lying on the right, the male is born. When it occurs lying on the left, the female is born. There should be no physical union during day.

Frequent sexual union will result in the loss of semen. The healthy body will soon be spoilt. To be without sexual indulgence is also not good. The absence of sexual intercourse will affect the seminal content and it will dry up owing to heat. Then the body will be gone. There should be bodily union once in sixteen days, for a seminal release. Tumescence of the phallus will not occur in those who are constantly devoted to God. Therefore, sexual indulgence is recommended only to the 'practitioners', and not to the mature 'attainers.' "

"To remain in wet-clothes, after an untimely bath, is bad for the body. One should always bathe in hot-water."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p.112.)

"When rice is cooked, the gruel should be drained, after cooking. To cook rice with the gruel is not good as there is fat. It will make us dull."

"Similarly, salt, tamarind, chillies, etc. should be roasted, to remeve their fat, before eating."

"Raw rice is not what is found to day..."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p.109.)

The above reference to rice, in his discourses, is left incomplete.

"Food should be eaten only after an interval of three hours."

"Increasing life through the eating of pure and nourishing food is a way of the Pure and Righteous Path."

"Salt is injurious to health. It is the Siddha way to add salt to solid foods."

Saint Ramalinga was also an excellent doctor. He named certain herbs and also taught the ways to use them, to prevent the occurrence of diseases and to cure them. The seers (Siddhars) of olden days were also excellent doctors. That is why the methods that the Tamils found were named after the *Siddhars* as *Siddha* medicine. Saint Ramalinga endeavoured to give new life to *Siddha* medicine. For a deathless life, he preached his disciples not only devotion to Lord Shiva, but also the use of *Siddha* medicine. Today's *Siddha* doctors recommend all kinds of regimen to sufferers. Along with these, devotion and discipline should also be practised as regimen.

XII

THE GLORIOUS LIFE WITHOUT DEATH

Those born are bound to die. This is the truth we have found in our experience. Science also approves of this. But as a true mystic, Vallalar declares that it is possible for man to live for ever without death. He says that death occurs because of our carelessness.

He praises God as "Thou Infinite, serving as the Quintessence of the Art of Immortality." Even after gulping deadly poison Shiva remained immortal. Therefore, Vallalar believes that those who are suffused with His Grace will attain the glorious life without death. Saint Manickavasaka described God variously as "the Youth of No-Birth", the "King who ends the Illusion of Birth", the "Lord of the Birth", and "the Ender of this Life of Suffering". But Vallalar describes Him as "the Lord" who ends Death.

Bharati, the Seer

Religionists believe that the seers of yore, putting an end to death, live still amidst mountains and in woods. But Bharati seems to refute this in these lines;

Many seers (of the past), described by our forebears,
Are dead and gone, becoming dust unto dust.

They are supposed to reside in holes,
In the bushes somewhere in the woods.

And to be seen here and there on hills,
Like a shadow now and then.

What is the use of probing the festering wound?
Ye see that the enlightened Buddha died of disease.

The Brahmin saints Sankaracharya and Ramanuja too died.
Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross.

An evil arrow ended Krishna's life.

But Bharati also accepts as a philosophic principle, Vallalar's view that it is possible for man to live without death. He declares positively that those who accept the view, if they try, could live without death.

" Even the renowned Rama was drowned to death,
But ye shall see I shall be immortal on earth.
I do not lie but state the truth.
I shall not lie even if I were to die.
There is neither misery nor death for mankind.
Hark ye! If ye destroy timidity, worry,
anger, falsehood, fear and desire,
Death shall be destroyed.
The rest I shall tell ye later. Ye conquer anger first.
Then there shall be no death in this world.
To remain without death is not by our wisdom.
We are born in this world by the grace of
Goddess Sakti.
I shall tell the meaning in sweet Tamil.
Hark ye people of the world! The creator
will protect us."

Singing thus, he declares that only by God's grace, death could be conquered.

The Seed of Scriptures

Vallalar drives home this truth to us by describing God as "Thou Infinite, standing for the Quintessence of the Art of Immortality." He states further that the "Knowledge of Immortality is the True Knowledge", and that the "Joy resulting from the Knowledge of

Immortality alone is Bliss". Yes. The Saint believes intensely that it is possible for man to live without death.

The power to grant the glorious life without death belongs exclusively to the Hindu religion, says Vallalar. His sermons as follows confirm this:

"Scriptures have importantly dealt with the art of immortality".
(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p.61.)

"Only Hindu scriptures and sermons have mentioned about the attainment of supernatural and spiritual powers. No other religion has mentioned about the above mentioned powers, or about the knowledge of immortality. By any chance, if there are references, it is true that they will be exclusively from Hindu scriptures and canons."
(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p.68.)

Though Saint Ramalinga was a Righteous Path Seeker, above castes and creeds, he did not hesitate to give dispassionate expression to the merits of Hindu religion.

See Ye the Tamil Bible!

Saint Ramalinga says that the Tamil gospel, *Thirukural* also states about the knowledge of immortality:

"There are references in the first chapter of Thiruvalluvar's *Kural*, to knowledge of immortality. It should be learnt from a proper teacher.
(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p.61.)

1. "Long they live on earth who gain
The feet of God in florid brain."

2. " The prospect long who walk His way
Who has the senses signed away."

In each of these songs of the *Kural* the lines, *Needu Vazhvar*, is interpreted by Vallalar as "they will live for all times, with an ever permanent body." No other commentator has said this.

Declaring that it is possible for man to live immortally, he emphasises that the sole means for attaining it is the Pure and

Righteous Path, and invites all to join the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path, in the following lines:

"See that the glorious Righteous Path alone
Will save ye from disease, ageing and death.
Know ye and come!"

According to his view, man should discard castes and creeds and attain feelings of spiritual love and universal brotherhood, for being immortal. He declares that God had sent him to redeem mankind from death: "Thou Unique Cosmic Dancer, my Spiritual Guide and Leader! The evil code of many creeds and religions spread in this world. Therefore, not being aware of the good path, the people of this world suffered in the darkness of ignorance. My Lord! Thou exhorted me, "Henceforth you eschew the wicked path and lead the people through the Pure and Righteous Path that bestows the divine nectar of Universal Love."

Means to Immortality

"Those who have completely severed themselves from the bonds of castes and creeds which are obstacles to the Pure and Righteous Path; those who have eschewed carnal aberrations, with the help of spiritual awareness; those who have avoided killing and eating flesh—these alone could belong to the Pure and Righteous Path, as they would be capable of avoiding death, disease, decay, fear and pain".

"The rest who wait, can not avoid death."

(B.K. Pillai, 4, p.96.)

Apart from his believing that man could live without death, he also endeavours to make others believe in it. He speaks to people who weep for the dead ones thus:

"Ye people of the world,
Ye cry aloud when the dead are taken away.
Why will ye not receive the boon of immortality?
Ye people of the world?
I tell ye this true word out of love,

Think of me as your friend, not as an adversary.
Ye see that the learned and the unlettered
as well die.
Will ye approve of death that frightens your
faculties?

Your heart may be hard or harsh, I do not know,
Mine will never let this happen.
My path is the Righteous Path that conquers death
Join me. Death can be averted.

Ye will relax thinking ye know all.
But the fiend of death will descend.
Alas! Ye can not prevent it,
Except the followers of the Universal and
Righteous Path.
See ye that none in any world is capable of
opposing and preventing it.

Ye people of the world!
Take my word as an oath,
And hold firmly to the vision of the followers
of the Righteous Path,
Who have divested themselves of all ties that bind,
Ye will never die.

In these verses, assuring the people of the world that it is possible to live without death, if they join him, exhorts all of them to do so. Saddened that the people, not knowing the ways of living without death, die every day, he appeals to God thus:

Mother, Oh, Mine!
Thou who radiate, suffused in my heart of hearts!
Oh, Lord! Thou knoweth the despair that my heart
experienced,
Smarting whenever the loud beats of the drum,
That indicate the death of people, were heard.
In this world, it is but natural
That my heart should tremble at the thought of death."

If man desires to live without death, he should pray to God for this grace and blessing. Worshipping God, with constant thought of Him, will alone give one the blessing of immortality. That is why Vallalar prayed to God, for himself and for all men.

"Making this body eternal, make me live a glorious and beatific life."

"Make all others, with a body, live a similar life."

To attain immortality, Vallalar preached three great gospels. They are:

1. Remain Hungry.
2. Remain Alone.
3. Remain Awake.

The interpretations of these three great gospels can be found in the Saint's Songs and Sermons.

Remain Hungry

Saint Ramalinga's exhortation, "Remain Hungry", does not mean "fasting". The meaning is :"Do not eat to live in comfort, eat half, just to subsist". We should remember that Gandhiji ate as little a quantity as to make him feel always hungry. Vallalar says that right from his childhood days he had observed the vow of fasting, and that, occasionally, on compulsion from others, he had eaten fully. We know this from this song:

Beginning from the day on which I became
conscious of worldly feelings on earth,

For somedays I ate a lot of food
fearing to see my mother feel hurt.

For somedays I ate
fearing to hurt my kindred, beloved and the devoted.

Except on such occasions

Thou knoweth I trembled to eat delicious food.

Nackeerar in *Thirumurukatruppadai*, referring to the sages, says that they remained hungry for long hours, and ate only once. It may be appro-

priate for householders to eat often. But this is not right for the Righteous Path Seekers who aspire for the glorious life without death.

He would Feed as Though a Mother

It is possible for those who always think of Shiva and have the capacity to see God everywhere and in every thing, to remain hungry. In the following poem, Vallalar gives expression to his experience:

"The Lord, who hath the world renowned and holy nectar in his possession in the Divine Realm of Wisdom,
Offered me succour today.
I ate to my heart's content.
I am delighted, becoming the very embodiment of the experience of bliss,
I do not know weariness, distress, nor the afflicting hunger.
Oh, Thou art my good companion as a result of my good deeds.
Thou came in search of me during the dark of the night,
When I was lying in a corner of a veranda
And offered me food, made me eat,
And blessed me with your Grace, appearing my hunger.
Whenever I was hungry, as if Thou wert hungry,
Thou gave me food and brought me up fondly.
Oh, Divine Radiance! Thou went pleased to give me
The clear and sweet nectar, in order that
The weariness of hunger should never occur."

If devotees remained hungry, God would come to feed them as though He were a mother! This was Vallalar's experience. He remained hungry not because of lack of food. He did not like to eat. This is the characteristic of the "attainers" of the Righteous Path. Vallalar states that the "practitioners" who have not achieved a maturity "should be given food as soon as they are hungry." Even those who are not initiated into the code of devotion, should remain partially hungry as this is essential for good health.

Remain Alone!

The second great gospel of the Saint is: "Remain Alone.' Solitude gives solace to the mind. Vallalar says that "if one remains alone in contemplation of Shiva, great bliss can be experienced." In an atmosphere of din and bustle, there cannot be God-consciousness. Even if there is consciousness of God, it will not last. That is why the Saint declares that solitude is essential for initiating ourselves into the knowledge of immortality. But he did not encourage any one to run away to hills and woods for seeking solitude. He preached frequently that remaining amidst the people and serving them, one should remain alone for enlarging his spiritual illumination.

Even when Gandhiji was the leader of a great political revolution, he established an *ashram* in a quiet hamlet and remained there.

Remain Awake

The third gospel of Vallalar is "Remain Awake." Wisemen say that sages who have attained immortality, avoid sleep, and are always in deep contemplation of great bliss. They sleep very rarely. Hence Saint Thayumanava said: "When to attain bliss in sleep without sleep?" Saint Ramalinga says:

"Avoiding sleep improves longevity. If one learns to sleep for an hour a day, he will live for a thousand years. Thinking of the feet of God, the teacher ever constantly will be conducive to a knowledge of immortality."

(B.K. Pillai,V. 4, p.67.)

It is said that Gandhiji never slept beyond three hours each day. It is the same with chaste women who devoutly worship their husbands as evidenced by the tribute paid by Sage Valluvar to the chastity of his wife, Vasuki, thus: "You who go to sleep late and rise early . . ."

While describing his condition before becoming a Pure and Righteous Path Seeker, for attaining divine grace, Vallalar confesses: "I knew only sleeping as comfort." Later, when he intensely desired to become one with the divine, he sings in the form of heroine talking to her companion:

"Oh, dear girl!
You ask me to sleep!
Will I sleep?
Will I feel like sleeping at this hour,
When my Lord doth come?
As I wish to be alone here now,
Take with you all my sleep, dear friend,
Go somewhere and sleep.
I shall wake you up with delight,
After my Lord, the pupil of my eye, embraces me,
And I become one with Him who hath suffused me with Him."

That only by the grace of God it is possible to attain the power of sleeplessness is revealed in his line: "Lord! You over-mastered me by teaching me the art of sleeplessness." When he, attaining a 'golden' body, by remaining hungry and awake, sings: "Sing and play that sleep be gone!"

The three great gospels—"Remain Hungry", "Remain Alone", and "Remain Awake", were followed by Saint Thayumanava also, as is shown in this lyric by him:

"I wished to be alone,
Contemplating in quiet solitude.
And eating merely fruits or meagre vegetables,
Even dry leaves or roots,
When hunger shoots flames from within.
Oh, God, don't Thou know my wish to be alone?"

He says that we should "eat only when hunger shoots flames from within." Even then, no tasty food, but fruits and vegetables (without being choosy) should be eaten. When these are not available, even dry leaves could be taken.

Even as the Saint prayed for the immortality of all lives, he also intensely prayed for himself in many lyrics and for long, before God.

"I reposed all my love in Thy miraculous realm of wisdom, Oh, Lord,
Realising that what I have learnt is the knowledge of being immortal.
I reposed all my love at Thy golden-flower-like feet that dance in the space, oh, Lord,
Because they would save me from decay, and bless me with the boon of immortality."

Finally, he states that he attained immortality:

"I attained eternity and immortality,
I got rid of the fear of death,
I am content.
Oh, my penance did bear fruit!

I am free from difficulties,
I have got rid of grief,
I have no more distress,
I have dispensed with the law of birth (and death),
I have given up sleep,
I have avoided disease and death,
I have attained sublimity,
I have acquired the name, [the Dear and True Son of the Lord.

I am content.
Oh, my penance did bear fruit.

I learnt the knowledge of the realm of wisdom.
Learning it, I imbibed the virtue of grace.
I attained the timeless and ever lasting form of light.
Having reached this higher state,
I shall not attach myself to earthly things.
I hold my love of Shiva as my only love indeed!

Play and Sing!

Vallalar's verses scintillate with divine light, after he attained divine grace and became godly. He discreetly brings out the difference between the songs he sang before his attainment of divine grace, and those after:

"Ye girls! play and sing!
The veil has been torn apart,
The effulgent radiance has arisen,
The divine light of grace flourishes,
Ye girls! play and sing!
My prayer has born fruit.
Ye girls! play and sing!
I have seen the Father.
I have received the boon of immortality.
I rejoice over it.
Ye girls! Play and sing!
I have attained supernatural powers."

The embodiment of humility that the Saint was, he declared, after his attaining immortality, that those who held him in scorn and contempt, without following his advice, had praised him.

The wicked were afraid of me and went away without saying a word.
They came again and stood at the threshold seeking my refuge.
Those belonging to the Order of the Righteous Path alone have succeeded.
Those who scorned me from behind have come to nought.
They are not fit even to stand below the golden stairs.
They cry aloud regretting their unjust speech,
They now hail and praise me.

The Sage of Vadaloor was one who was suffused with God, as a result of his divine consciousness and realization. He attained

a final beatitude of life. First he was at the dual (Dvaitha) stage, distinguishing himself from *Him* that is God. Later, being aware of God, he became God-suffused the Monistic (Adhvaitha) way, by the discipline of compassion to all living beings. This is according to the *Songs of Divine Grace.* At the Dvaitha state, distinguishing himself from God, he appeals to God, as follows:

"This is the auspicious moment for Thee to give,
Bless me with the unique and supreme light divine.
This is one way to redeem me,
Otherwise gladly take away my body and life.
I agree to either way.
Thy holy feet are the witness to what I say,
Thy heart alone knoweth mine.
My Mother, my Father, my Master and my Lord!
Formless and in form Thou reside within me.

"Oh, Lord of Siddhipuram who blesses those who avoid strife!
Oh, Jewel of the Super Mind! My Lord the Cosmic Dancer!
Won't Ye open the sacred door discarding the veils?
Won't Ye show the sacred form, the divine grace of effulgent radiance?
Mortifying myself I drew out from the well of nectar.
Won't Ye grant the true feeling that will suffuse my body, mind and soul with radiance?
Oh, God of Form Unique, beyond material expectations?
Suffusing me with Thee,
Won't Ye make me rejoice everyday,
Without any thought of day or night?"

Adhvaitha, after Dvaitha!

Thus, Ramalinga Vallalar, attained an inner light, by his intense singing and penance. He describes the time when he attained the Adhvaitha stage at which man became God, and the moment he achieved the glorious life without death, by His grace.

Saint Ramalinga, indicates through many songs, his attaining the gift of immortality. He worships deeply and praises gratefully the Supreme Light Divine who gave him the privilege of realizing the eternal soul in this life itself.

"My God, my Lord, the Master of my Being
Cometh today to be in my place.
Within the coming hour He will unite with my glorious body,
And remain within me inseparably.
This I know and state as a result of my great penance.
This is the truth and the only truth.
Oh, dear girl with a slender waist!
You will realise my word after the passing of this hour."

Vallalar noted at the end of these verses, in his own hand; "I have stated thus, as commanded by the Almighty."

"Oh, Unique and Supreme Light Divine!
Thou Ocean of Virtue who elevated and granted me the Boon of Immortality!
Oh, Supreme Light Divine!
Thou who revealed me the Thirty Six Universal Qualities (of Nature, God and Man).

"I grant thee the state of deathlessness
Prosper thee from now on"—
Bestow me thus with grace, Oh, Supreme Light Divine!
Grant me with grace the true path
As described by the scriptures and canons,
Oh, Supreme Light Divine!

Blow ye the conch
That He granted me immortality,
That my thoughts have come true,
That He united me with Himself,
And Hail the Lord of the Realm of Wisdom.

Beat ye the drums

That I have become the Divine Light of Grace,

That I have attained the sway of grace,

That I am freed of my attachment to illusions,

That I have overcome death."

Thus Saint Ramalinga announces to the world God's suffusion of his heart and His granting him the glorious life without death, through drums, conchs and the emblem of a flag.

Those who attempt to see God are devotees, and those who have become one with Him are sages. Religionists believed that they were capable of performing eight miracles. The most well-known among the seers are Agastiya, Thirumoolar and Thayumanava. Saint Ramalinga came in their line. His principal disciple, Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar declares that Saint Ramalinga was one who came in the timeless tradition of seers. Vallalar also says that he lives amidst those seers of today, who have attained an ever? permanent body.

Seer he Became!

Even in his childhood days, Saint Ramalinga's heart was captivated by the songs of seers. He knew by rote hundreds of songs of these seers, which he could sing losing himself in them. His belief was that the path of mysticism was the best path.

After attaining immortality by the grace of God, Saint Ramalinga acquired the capacity to perform the eight miracles. He declares that God alone gave him that capacity:

"I saw the Supreme Light Divine,
I drank the clear nectar of bliss,
I broke the darkness of ignorance,
I achieved supernatural powers.

The elixir of the Pure and Righteous Path,
The elixir that flourishes in the mountain of Divine Light Grace,

The elixir is the very form of wisdom,
It enabled me to perform all the miracles.

Oh, Supreme Light Divine!
Thou art my Father who gave me
The power to perform all the miracles.

Thou gave me out of compassion,
The true state (the state of immortality),
Making me aware of supernatural powers.

I perform miracles.
I have received the boon of immortality.
Whom shall I call my equal in this world?

Oh, Jewel of Cosmic Dancer!
Thou deigned with joy to walk,
Hurting Thy flower-like feet that shine,
Transcending the perception of even Lord Vishnu,
And reached the place where this humble self was.
Thou calling me with love, blessed me.

"Dear Son! All your wishes will be fulfilled,
This is freedom from all impurities."

"I have not done anything grateful to Thee,
Dog that I am what shall I say of Thy Grace?"

Miraculous Powers Three:

Saint Ramalinga states in the *Songs of Divine Grace* that the miraculous powers are myriad and that God exemplified them.

Generally, Saint Ramalinga classifies these powers into three categories, as

1. Power of Action
2. Power of Concentration
3. Power of Wisdom

"Oh, Supreme Light Divine!
Bestow me with the threefold powers and their fruits.

Oh, Supreme Light Divine!

Let me command the myriad arts of the powers of action.

Oh, Supreme Light Divine!

Let me have the myriad means of the power of concentration.

Oh, Supreme Light Divine!

Let me have in full the good dimensions of the power of wisdom.

He states thus in his "Ode on the Supreme Light Divine",

Traditionally, there are "Eight Great Powers" (to be performed), Vallalar also accepts these when he says in the *Arutpa* line, "All the Eight Great Powers will be at Thy beck and call".

The Eight Great Powers

These refer to Eight Great Miraculous Powers. They are as follows:

1. **Animaa**: Reducing the physical body to the size of an atom.
2. **Mahimaa**: Enlarging the body to infinite proportions.
3. **Ilahimaa**: Making the body as light as air.
4. **Karimaa**: Making the body weighty.
5. **Prapthi**: Have a sway over everything.
6. **Vasithvam**: Attracting every one to one's own way.
7. **Pirakaamiyam**: Jumping from one body to another.
8. **Easathvam**: Attaining and experiencing everything desired.

The author of the *Thiruvilayadalpurana*, Sage Paranjothi, elucidates these "Powers" in eight songs. Saint Thayumanava also says that these "miracles" are easily performed and that it is more difficult to control thought and remain doing nothing.

We can bring under our sway
  Horses and mighty elephants.
We can even bind the mouth
  Of bears and fierce tigers.
We can ride on a lion and
  Tease its eyes and ears.

Making a chariot of fire, we can split the five worlds,
Sell and do away with them.
We can saunter in this world unseen by others.
We can even command celestial beings.
We can remain young for ever.
We can even enter another body,
Walk on water, sit on fire,
And attain incomparable supernatural powers.
Oh, God of Wisdom, residing in my mind
becoming its very substance!
Oh, Splendour of Joy!
The art of remaining idle, controlling the mind is difficult indeed!

Further, in the poems, under the title, *An Assembly of Seers*; (*Siddhar Kanam*), Saint Thayumanava explains all the powers of the seers.

Puerile Play!

In the *Thiruvilayadalpurana*, Sage Paranjothi describes Lord Shiva as the teacher of the Eight Great Miracles, to the "six Karthigai women."

"Though the sages who realised Me
Would not wish for supernatural Powers.
These are such powers that will make
Those people of the world who follow them as a shadow
Understand their greatness."

" Saying thus,
God Shiva of Eight Qualities
Taught the six Karthigai women
The Eight Supernatural Powers."

The doing of penance by mystics is not for attaining the power of performing miracles. It is only for attaining final bliss. The wise really consider these performances as only childish play. Vallalar also declares in this song that it is childish to openly demonstrate these powers of performing miracles:

"Oh Spiritual Mentor, Thou who made me realize
With Thy Light of Divine Grace that
Nanmugas, Rudras, Naranas, Indras
And religious heads such as Argha and Buddha,
Are but a group of children who, having received
A little of the Light of Grace,
Play on earth and in heaven according to whims and fancies,
Behaving like those who have drunk honey.
Oh, Lord who dances in the Hall of Wisdom!
Be pleased to wear my garland of verses."

Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, contemporaneous, to Saint Ramalinga, warns the people "not to seek those who perform miraculous deeds for they have strayed away from the path of truth." Saint Ramalinga's principle also is the same. Though he was capable of performing miracles, he did not wish to receive the approbation of the people by such performances. He declares that Lord Shiva who had given him those powers, and commanded him not to perform miracles.

"Oh, Light, Thou who uttered,
"The Eight Supernatural Powers will be under your command
But do not desire to command them."

A brief history of Saint Ramalinga is provided in the *Songs of Divine Grace*, consisting of the first five canons, published by the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path in Madras. "There is a catalogue in it of all the miracles the Saint had performed", That he had the ability to perform those deeds could not be denied. But, would he who had attained immortality and the Adhvaitha State, have expended his thought on performance of miracles? We are unable to believe this. It is also worthwhile noting that accounts about such miracles are not confirmed even by a single verse in the *Songs of Divine Grace*. Perhaps, he could have occasionally revealed his ability to perform such miracles to the "attainers" of the Righteous Path, around him. But we could not say that the Saint had performed those miracles merely for the sake of fame or riches.

Saint Ramalinga, in a number of letters written to his friends mention about his administering to the sick and curing them, as they helplessly sought him. He had written to Irukkam Rathina Mudaliar, seeking financial help for a Tamil scholar who suffered without money. Why, even for his own requirement of white cloth, he wrote to Rathina Mudaliar, to beg it as loan which he would repay later. We had pointed out this detail earlier. Thus, either in his letters or in his verses are there many accounts of his performing miracles for acquiring riches or fame.

"I have no wish to become famous,
As to be hailed great by all the world.
I have no wish to perform miracles."

Could the Saint who sang thus, have performed miracles before people, forgetting the Feet of Lord Shiva?

The All-Powerful Seer

The privilege of performing miracles belongs only to God. He too performs miracles only for the sake of granting divine grace to the devotees. With a view to granting grace to Vallalar, our Lord had performed many a miracle.

One day, Vallalar who went to Tiruvotriyoor to worship Lord Thiagesa, returned home very late at night. As the door was latched, he slept in the verandah with a keen hunger. The Lord came there as the mother and affectionately fed and protected him, as described by the Saint:

"Oh, Mother, beloved of my Being!
When I lay in a verandah, hungry and weary,
Carrying in Thy sacred hand the vessal with the divine nectar,
Thou hastened to wake me up,
And hungry as I was, Thou gladly offered it to me.
Oh, Thou who art my companion as a result of my good deeds!
Thou came in search of me in the dark of the night,

When I was lying in a corner of a verandah,
And offered me food, made me eat,
And blessed me with your grace, appeasing my hunger.

The Lamp that Burned with Water!

The Great Book of the Songs of Givine Grace gives the following account, about God performing another miracle, when Vallalar stayed in Karunguzhi, at the residence of Venkata Reddiar, a follower of the Righteous Path.

"One day, as all the people in Reddiar's house-hold had to proceed to another place, an oil lamp, was lit and a new mud pot, full of water, was left by the lamp, to acclimatize it for use. As usual, the Saint sat beside the lamp and began writing his verses. When the oil got exhausted, he kept on pouring the water from the pot, thinking there was oil in it. The lamp also was burning!

Reddiar's wife who returned home at dawn, was amazed that by the miracle of the Saint, the lamp burnt with water! The Saint, being told of this by the lady, was also amazed, and praised God for His Grace." He wrote a poem on this event to his friends in Madras. This is a miracle that the Lord performed, without his knowledge, and to his amazement.

Even though Vallalar had the power of alchemy to convert baser metals into gold, he did not use it. When one of his disciples was distracted by his interest in alchemy, with a view to correcting him, he converted iron into sixteen carat gold and made it disappear, saying thus: "This is possible only for those who are free from desire. Therefore, do not be led away by alchemy."

A Disciple Testifies!

According to Saint Ramalinga, God had given him the powers to perform all the Eight Miracles, so called. But his principal disciple, Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar declares that miracles were performed even without his knowledge:

"It was clear to many that he had the rare power of converting non-vegetarians to vegetarianism."

"He was capable of reading the minds of others."

"He used to dematerialize himself, so that his disciples and others would not know his whereabouts. He would disappear like this for many days."

It is not known that the Saint went out, after he had settled at Siddhivalagam, in Mettukkuppam. Therefore, if he had performed miracles, he should have done so only in Vadaloor or Mettukuppam. But he had not done so. Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar states as follows: "People of various communities used to surround him in big crowds. But they had not gone there for his sermons, but to see him perform those miracles. He often used to emphasize to them that he had no such miracles to perform and that his aim was seeking the Pure and Righteous Path."

We understand from the examples cited so far that though Saint Ramalinga was a seer who had the powers to perform miracles, he did not indulge in such childish plays, with a view to increasing his fame, by deceiving the people.

People thought that Saint Ramalinga had the powers to revive the dead. This caused him a big inconvenience. In this song, he entreats God to grant him the powers to revive the dead:

"Oh, Father! Please listen to my prayer and
bless me with Thy grace.
Let me receive the Light of Divine Grace and
rejoice at heart.
Let me resurrect the dead here.
And let me make them slaves of Thy Divine Hall.

Oh, Lord! Please listen to my prayer and
bless me with Thy grace.
Let me receive the Divine Light of Grace and
rejoice at heart.
Let all lands within bounds come under a sole discipline.
Let me redeem the dead."

The Dead will Rise!

Later, the Saint revealed that he had attained the power to revive the dead. Here are some lines from the poems alluding to such powers:

"Oh, Supreme Light Divine!
Thou who granted the virtue
To raise the dead in this world!
Oh, Supreme Light Divine!
Thou who revealed the power
Of letting the dead wake up with laughter!
Oh, Supreme Light Divine!
Give me the moral support
To revive the dead whenever I willed."

"Oh, Son, don't have any fear!
I have given thee the Light of Divine Grace.
Wake the dead up
And make them follow the Righteous Path with joy."

Apart from his declaring that he had received the powers of reviving the dead from God, he writes that there was nothing amazing about it!

"Should I accomplish the resurrection of the dead on this earth,
Giving life to their corporeal body?
By the grace of the Lord of Divine Wisdom,
Even the very shawl that covers my body can gladly do it!

People dance about exclaiming in wonder at the
Miracle of the dead rising in this world.
Such is the power of those who have received the Benign Grace
Of the Lord of Divine Wisdom, the Spiritual Mentor!"

The Saint's Denial:

Even though the Saint had declared in a number of his verses that he had acquired the powers of reviving the dead, he never mentioned even in a single poem that he would revive the dead. He declared that the privilege of such a miracle solely belonged to the Almighty God. An acquirement of such powers is one thing, and the prerogative of using it is another!

> "Oh, my people!
> By what power can the revival of the dead be achieved here?
> The miracle of the Light of Divine Grace alone can achieve it.
> This is the great truth of wisdom indeed!"

In this song, he declared clearly that he had no desire to perform the miracle of reviving the dead, and thus tried to remove the false notions that the people had about him.

The deeper the Saint's inner illumination, the greater was the difficulty of the people of the world in understanding him. He felt that it was possible for every one to receive the Divine Grace which was granted to him as a result of his penance. He also said that God would arrive to grant everyone the grace He had given him.

The Father doth Come!

Saint Manickavasaka told the people: "God, offers the treasure of Grace. Hasten ye to receive it!" Saint Thayumanava sang:

> "Ye see that the crows eat in company.
> The flood of bliss of the boundless experience of God,
> Overflows and is available in sole form and perfection.
> Ye people of the world, come in company!
> Let us drink it with delight ere this body falls."

Like them, Ramalinga Vallalar also exhorted all to come to see the sight of the full and unique gushing forth of Divine Grace:

"Do not despair as to day
When our Father, the Lord who doth overmaster us, will come
Or worry that He will take too long to come
This day He hath chosen to come.
This is the truth that I state with certainty.

Ye see this is the good day,
When the dead will come to life.
Believe ye my words.
This day the Supreme Light Divine doth suffuse the world.
This is the truth of Divine Grace.

Ye people who live in all the four directions!
I exhort in earnestness.
Do not scorn my word as falsehood.
Our Father, the Giver of Grace cometh upon this earth,
This very moment His Divine Play to manifest."

"God will come. He will make the dead rise. To all those living he will grant immortality", said Vallalar. This shows his deep desire. Saint Thayumanava declared: "Let the world share the blessings I have received." Saint Ramalinga also desired the same.

Innocent People!

It is difficult for ordinary people either to know the mind or understand the utterances of wise men like Saint Ramalinga. It is no surprising that the ordinary folk have not understood him, for even scholars conversant with scriptures and canons have failed to understand him. All of them believed mistakenly that the Saint would make the dead rise. A few mischief mongers who were religious fanatics, were antagonistic to the Saint. They should have secretly spread these deas with a view to causing trouble to Vallalar. It was also possible that some of those who were devoted to the Saint, without understanding him, believed him in their innocence and made others also believe that the Saint was going to perform the miracle of reviving the dead.

Ramalinga Vallalar believed as follows: "All should be members of the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path."

"Transcending the differences of castes and creeds, they should perform corporate worship, everyday, at the Hall of Truth and Wisdom, in Vadaloor."

"Following the discpiline of compassion to living beings, they should put an end to the hunger of the poor,"

"They should believe that there is God and know clearly that He is one. All the people of the world should become one in Spiritual, Love and Universal Brotherhood." He lived for these principles only and endeavoured to see a fruition of these ideals.

He declared that if these aims succeeded and a Society of the Pure and Righteous Path was created, there, in that society, the Lord of the Supreme Light Divine will appear, and he will revive the dead and grant immortality to those living.

The Dead Heaped!

Without understanding these explanations, people ran into difficulties, in the belief that Saint Ramalinga would make the dead rise quickly.

A report of yore says that bodies of dead relatives were brought to the great plain of Vadaloor and after a few days were buried there itself. Perhaps, this was true, but Saint Ramalinga was not responsible for this by any means.

In this regard, the following notification from Siddhivalagm was published on 8-9-1873:

"Know ye who are arriving at or on the way to Siddhivalagam at the boundary of Karunguzhi, in Mettukkuppam, to offer worship at the Hall of Truth and Wisdom which is being established at North Chidambaram of Wisdom, otherwise also known as Gnanasiddhipuram, as follows:

A rumour is afloat that on the 5th of October next, a miraculous event will take place at the above place. Do not put yourself to financial and physical hardships and later on be angry, by believing what you have heard. What you have heard is not a fact. There is no certainty of such miracles occuring, now, or later. Therefore, know by this announcement that you shall take care to attend to matters most important to you."

Perhaps, people were enlightened, after this publication.

XIII

THE ENEMY OF ATHEISM !

The atheists say. that there is no God. We understand that they existed even during Vedic times. Scriptures themselves refer to such detractors. Gnostics believe themselves to be ever obedient to God. Atheists consider themselves as enemies of God. As soon as belief in God was born, so should have the reaction against such belief.

Atheism was in existence in Tamil Nadu, in the Sangam period of two thousand years ago. We know this from the homilitic utterances of the Sangam poet, Uraiyoor Muthukannan Chathanar, to Cholan Nalankilli:

> "Shun the association of those who deny
> The virtue of the good and the vile of the wicked."

A commentator glosses the meaning thus: "The idea that a righteous deed brings advantages, and a wicked deed brings evil does not apply to those who do not believe in either." Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Aiyar considers these "non-believers" to be atheists. The great sage Valluvar refers only to atheists in this *Kural*:

> "To people's "Yes" who proffer "No"
> Deemed as ghouls on earth they go."

That those denying the existence of God, rebirth and the consequences of good and bad deeds, lived even during the time of Vallu-

var is borne out by Parimelazhagar's commentary on this *Kural*.

Secularism!

We understand that atheists existed even during the time of Saint Manikavasaka, author of *Thiruvasakam*, from these lines:

"Those other than theists gathered together
And became thick tongued, talking atheism."

His harsh utterance, "became thick tongued", brings out his dislike for those who said there was no God. Further, Manickavasaka also describes secularism as

"The poison of schism of the shining serpent of
secularism."

There are subtle differences between atheism and secularism. That is why Saint Manickavasaka differentiated them and condemned them separately. But at a later time, religious scholars considered secularism also, only as atheism.

The maidens, in *Thiruvasakam Thiruvembavai*, who worship the Lord of Thiruvannamalai after a sacred bath, in Margazhi, (December) appeal to him thus:

"Our Lord! We wish to tell you something!
We shall not embrace those who do not follow you!"

From this it is evident that even maidens disliked atheists. Also elsewhere, the maidens of those days sing that they wish to be given in marriage only to gnostics, and not to atheists.

"We devotees of Thy beautiful feet,
We who have Thee as our Lord,
Shall supplicate at the feet of Thy followers.
We shall be companions only to them,
We shall have as husbands only them,
And we shall serve them taking their word
as our command."

Saint Thirunavukkarasu demonstrates with this poem that atheism existed in his days also:

"Do not talk atheism, taking reality as truth,
The five great elements will come armed.
The Lord of Thiruvanaika will freely give sanctuary
To those who seek Him."

Thus, Vallalar also, who came in the tradition of those who hated atheism, viewed it with utter distaste.

Ingersol!

Contemporaneous to Vallalar, there was a world famous atheist in America. He was Ingersol. He was born ten years after Saint Ramalinga. His atheistic voice should have echoed in India also.

It was at this time, that both English education and European culture which spread throughout India, threw a challenge to Hindu orthodoxy. The mentality to hate tradition, grew strong among the English educated.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy argued that English should be learnt and it should be the common language for all times in India. This great man, steeped in European culture, began to hate the old customs and traditions of Hindu religion. As a result of this dislike, the Brahma Samaj he had founded, spread in Tamil Nadu also. Here also, the Movement grew strong only among the English educated.

A War of Ideas!

We had said earlier that Saint Ramalinga considered idol worship as a tacit convention.

He was for idol-worship only as the first means for receiving divine grace. A war of ideas therefore took place between Saint Ramalinga and the members of the Brahma Samaj who hated idol worship. In those days, Sambedu Stridhava Swamy Naicker was well-known among the members of the Brahma Samaj in Tamil Nadu. Between him and our Saint, a debate occured in a choultry, near Thirupathiripuliyoor. Before camping at Vadaloor, he gathered both sides in large numbers, and listened to their debate. He successfully

established at the end his view that without idol-worship, it is not possible to achieve the divine experience.

Even during Saint Ramalinga's time, there were secularists in Tamil Nadu, who refused to believe in God. They believed that what is seen is alone real proof, and that inference cannot be testimony.

A journal, by the name of *Thathuva Visarini* was also published, representing their views. Its editor debated with the Saint on God and Soul.

Foul Tongue!

Saint Ramalinga disliked the futile arguments of atheists and secularists. At the same time, he also whole heartedly opposed the superstitious beliefs prevalent among gonstics. He contended simultaneously with religionists, both from within and without. His mind examined everything dispassionately. Vallalar was saddened that a group of power mongers, with a view to demoninating others, indulged unfairly in religious polemics. He reveals thus in these verses:

"Mother, Oh, Mine!
For ever so many days,
Grace never reached those crowds,
They had no sense of justice or fairness.

And whenever I saw
The evil and the mean minded who misused power,
And the heinous who speak nothing but untruth,
I was disturbed at heart."

Vallalar detested atheism like poison. Contrary to his usual nature of showing kindness and love to others, he censured them with harsh words:

"The tongues of those who speak atheism are foul tongues.
The food tasteful to the tongue will become but foul refuse."

Singing thus, he revealed his dislike for them. He shuddered to see them, as he reveals in these lines:

"I shudder to see the non-believers who preach atheism to Thy devotees."

While debating with theists whose views differed from Vallalar, he exhorted them thus: "Ye people of the world, consider all your kinsmen, not your enemies". But he condemns atheists alone as alien! While exhorting his own heart, he says:

"Shun the association of those who rejoice in denying God."

There are those in Tamil Nadu today who go about advocating atheism with a merciless tongue. They also describe themselves as heirs to Saint Ramalinga! This is like the devil quoting the scripture!

Rationalists!

Vallalar criticises even those who in self-admiration look upon themselves as "rationalists". He exhorts and entreats his mind not to believe their false arguments:

"Do not accept the false utterances
Of those wicked liers who profess to know all."

Those who describe themselves as "rationalists" declare that their principle is that "God is one, so is mankind". This is an idea borrowed from Thirumoolar. Vallalar is the genuine disciple of Thirumoolar. It was indeed Thirumoolar's *Thirumanthiram* that he followed. So, Vallalar is also in agreement with the principle that "God is one" While rejecting the worship of multiple Gods, he declares: "I shall not utter the names of petty deities even forgetfully". He repudiates the false premises of preaching many Gods in the following verses:

"I will not associate myself with those, who,
Like people who pick grass instead of flowers,
Extol the petty deities instead of the holy feet of Thy Divine Self,
If I associate with them I shall cease to exist."

Further, in the following verses,

"Divine Giver Thou art,
I will respect only those who extol Thee.

Even if told to respect other deities,
I will not do so, even forgetfully in my dream.
Thy Feet alone reside in my heart, purifying it.
Even if other Lords were to appear before me,
And let me have a glimpse of their feet,
I will but harshly ignore them."

He speaks of the code of following the one and the only Omniscient and Universal Spirit, and not any other God.

"God is One"

He stresses that "As God is one", "so also is mankind." Thus to him, the description of mankind, as "good" and "bad", has no meaning except as mere words. As we see both these "kinds" dying, (irrespective of their "goodness" and "badness"), he stressed the truth that "all mankind is one". The so called "rationalists" among us speak divisively of communities as "Aryan" and "Dravidian", and split Indian society, by placing it on a path of enemity and not a path of goodness. Saint Ramalinga was an enemy to this folly. Though he refused to accept the theological interpretations of the scriptures and canons, he was not antagonistic to the Vedhic community (of Brahmins). On the contrary, he loved Brahmins and saw them as part of the society of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood.

Revolutionary Reform!

Saint Ramalinga was a revolutionary reformer. But he never showed animus to anything or to anybody. On the other hand, he tried to reform anyone by means of love. He declares that hatred cannot bring about a movement of socio-religious reform. Swami Vivekanandha, who was born during Vallalar's time and who lived after him, speaks of reforms of his time as follows:

"Our land is full of reformers, and various kinds of schemes for reform in the past hundred years. But it is clear that these reforms during these hundred years have not done any permanent good."

"Thousands of speeches on the platform were made. Many books, attacking Hindus and their culture, were written. However, no

advantage was gained. What is the reason for this? It is not difficult to find a reason for this. Their condemnation also is responsible for this."

"Many of the present day reforms are merely imitative of Western customs which are not suitable to India. That is why these reformistic movements have not produced any good. Hatred can not bring about any good."

(*Indian Lectures*, pp. 64-65.)

Possibly, Swami Vivekanandha refers to the members of the Brahma Samaj who aped Western culture. The world of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood that Vallalar desired to found was based entirely on Indian Culture.

The Saint's Path!

Saint Ramalinga commenced his reformistic movement on the basis that "there is God". Attaining redemption by the worship of God was made a practical scheme by him. It was not enough for these "rationalists", who showed love and devotion to Saint Ramalinga, to accept that "God is one". They should also worship Him, following the moral path. There are those who accept truth as a principle, but live uttering only falsehood. The tendency to accept the existence of God but not worshipping Him is also similar to that.

Referring to the "head" of the "rationalist" who does not worship the Lord that the Saint worships, he describes thus:

Oh, Lord of my being!
The head that never supplicates Thy feet is
A head which is a mere weight on the shoulders,
A cattle head, a pig's head,
A sheep's head, a mad dog's head,
A poisonous snake's head, a stone head,
A cruel and mean head,
And a head infested with worms.

Of the head of those who declare their belief in God, but who decline to worship Him daily, he describes variously as:

"A head which is only a weight,
A cattle-head,
A pig's head,
A sheep's head,
A mad dog's head,
A poisonous snake's head,
A stone head,
A cruel and mean head,
A head infested with worms."

What a relationship between him and those who refuse to worship God in their daily life!

Of these people who refuse to think of God, he writes further and appeals to God thus:

"Oh, Lord Unique of the Divine Realm of Wisdom!
Oh, my Mother, Father and Mentor!
Oh, Treasure of Grace!
Thy holy heart knoweth,
Mother, Oh, mine,
That I shuddered at heart.
Whenever I thought
Of those who do not have Thee in their heart."

Not to believe in God and to refuse to worship Him after accepting His existence are acts that are contrary to human nature. A more cruel deed than these is condemning God. Of these "pure - beings", he writes in these verses:

"Oh, famed Lord of the Kandha Shrine at glorious Chennai!
Oh, Gracious Lord Serene! Indwelling Gem!
Oh, Shanmuga! Lord Supreme!
Let me not associate myself with
Those debased people who say:

What are heaven, destiny,
soul, illusion, piety, bliss,
grace, good and bad deeds, boon and penance?
These mean nothing in life.

Eating tasteful food, wearing good clothes,
seeking the company of women, offering them
flowers, playing with them and having carnal pleasures
Are the real pleasures of life,
and are immediate gains on hand."

The meaning of this poem is somewhat difficult. Even Valluvar who said,

"Leaving ripe fruits the raw he eats,
Who speaks harsh words when sweet word suits,"

speaks of atheists, comparing them to evil spirits. It is not therefore surprising that Vallalar also follows him. Like the weeds that destory the tender plants, the pack of atheists permeate the mass of people. Showing consideration to the plants, we mercilessly pull the weeds out. Similarly, Vallalar, because of his love for living beings, was harshly critical of the abusers of God.

Amity

The Sage of Wardha, who appeared as an heir to the Sage of Vadaloor, showed compassion to athiests also and tried to seek an amity between theism and athiesm.

"Only 'He' is the athiesm of the atheist. His boundless love alone lets him 'to be' an athiest."

"Athiests too are devoted to truth. Why? Their intense devotion to truth makes them declare there is no God, owing to the doubts that arise in the minds.

(*Ragupathy Raghav*)

These are the thoughts of Gandhiji. What he seeks is not a harmony among the abusers of God. It is not also a harmony among

the selfish and harsh-hearted who go by mere "appearances". Gandhiji respects and refers to those who speak athiesm on the basis of rationality, righteousness and prime knowledge. He cares for their purity of heart and their selfless life. We may say that the condition of Vallalar also was the same.

The Atheists that the Saint Saw

An atheist and the editor of *Thathuva Visarini,* who argued with Vallalar, carried on an intellectural debate by attacking bitterly the Saint's songs referring to his seeing and conversing with God. This can be seen in the publications brought out against Vallalar by the orthodox circles. It is said that later on the atheist had a change of heart, became a theist and followed Vallalar.

Gandhiji declares: "It is possible to see God, and to listen to Him." The Sage of Wardha opposed the argument that "just because there is none who has seen God, it is not possible to see Him."

"If one wishes to see the Infinite Spirit, he should serve with love even the meanest creature as though it is his own and earn its love. He who sees this kind of love sees God directly." Thus says Gandhiji in his autobiography. Vallalar also makes this the qualification for seeing God. The Sage of Wardha states further:

"None can declare that it is never possible for God to speak with man. I have not known any one declaring so. If there is atleast someone in this world who could prove that God had personally commanded him, it would be a big benefit to mankind. There are many who speak of having met God. But just because many utter falsehood, without being able to prove their contact with God, it is not necessary for one who has truly heard the voice of God, to hide his experience. It should not also be hidden. There are indeed play-actors. What can we do with them? Can we disregard the greatness of Truth just because there are many who are false?"

Vallalar flourished as a divine paragon, as per Gandhiji's expectations. Only, as none had informed Gandhiji of this truth, he had not known him.

Strangers!

An atheistic debate is one thing. An agitation for socio-religious reform is another. These who are atheists go about declaring that there is no God. Listeners may be influenced by their intellectual argument. The imaginary ideas of a theist and the empty rituals and customs associated with them may be conducive to the growth of atheism. But to believe in and be confused by the empty arguments of an atheist as true, on the strength of his arguments, is folly!

One should not hope for success by arguing with atheists, Vallalar did not reveal his dislike for atheism by means of advising atheists. While referring to theists whose views differed from him he calls and exhorts them kindly as "Ye! people of the world", and attempts to reform their superstitions. We may cite as an example this utterance: "Ye! people of the world! Believe me! The words that I utter are words of the Lord." Thus, in so many places, he compassionately calls the people and preaches to them in order to mend their mind: But whenever he thinks of atheists and abusers of God, he entreats God's Grace so as to avoid them and have no contact with them.

Socio-religious reformers should first of all be deeply devoted to God and follow a code of worship in their daily lives. This is the lesson taught by Vallalar who is a socio-religious reformer.

Paramahamsa's Warning!

Ramakrishna Paramahamsa lets out a warning to reformers who are devoted to God:

"Are you talking of social reform? You can do that after seeing God. Do not forget that the sages of yore renounced the world in order to see God. Seeing God alone is required. If you so desire the rest will automatically come to you. Therefore see God first. Then you can lecture on social reform." (*Sermons*, 7.)

In order to see God first and then to receive His Grace. Vallalar sang intensely, visited pilgrim centres, and often meditated During those periods, he neither sang nor spoke of reform. The first five canons are proof for this. Only after receiving Grace, and as commanded by Him, he sang of social reforms. That is why he had the conviction to say, "All the words I utter are the words of the

Lord's own." The position of atheists of our time who are rationalists is different.

Art and Imagination

Saint Ramalinga sang: "Let those superstitious customs which glorify the imaginative works of art as permanent, find their grave." Rationalists may agree with this. But this is only an illusion. The Saint did not declare, "Let all Arts find their grave". His view is that "Art" is one thing and the "Imagination" that embellishes it is another. "Philosophy" is art. The story that is born to explain it is imagination. The "story" exists for the "art". "Art" does not exist for the story. Art is eternal. Imagination is transient. The time-spirit will falsify it. Hence, he did not encourage superstition which glorified the imaginary as permanent, rejecting art which alone is eternal.

Imagination is different from illusion. Imagination may not deal with the actual. Just because of that, it can not become false. It conduces to an advantage. Even-though we may call it "false", the good that comes out of it can not become bad. Valluvar's saying,

> "Even falsehood may for truth suffice,
> When good it brings removing vice."

is only to bring this out.

Saint Ramalinga supported all those stories which were invented in connection with Siddhanta-Vedhanta philosophies, because they were useful. But he detested the foolishness of believing them as historical facts. These "rationalists" wish to burn the epic works of mythologies.

Vallalar said, "Scriptures and canons that the world knows, are only lies." The "rationalist camp" may agree with this. But even this is only the result of ignorance. Vallalar's explanation that the "established scriptures and canons, (as the result of original revelations), are true, and those known (popularly) to the world are false", clearly distinguishes the difference between him and the rationalists, in the same manner in which butter is differentiated from lime.

It seemed that the habit of making people believe the philosophic stories and scenes as historical occurrences was only for the good

of the people. When at a later time, this belief was exploited for deceiving the people, of their money, the wise men opposed it. The utterance of Pattinathar, "Is my Lord Shiva to be found in metal and stone?", is an attack on superstition. Vallalar also sang:

The crowds of religions gathered,
With corporate motives of plunder.
The scriptures proclaimed by these crowds,
The scenes and stages showed by these deceptive scriptures,
And the Gods who present the scenes,
Are all but puerile play."

Here also, he does not attack religious truths, but only the falsehoods that are mixed with them. This also he sings with pain. Once Gandhiji said, "Temples have become brothals". This is not a condemnation of temples, but a condemnation of the way they are used.

Saint Ramalinga's Position

Saint Ramalinga approved of idol worship, but he refused to accept it as final. He accepted scriptures and canons, but disapproved of the wrong interpretations given by a few. In the interest of the people, he accepted stories of epics and mythologies, but he never considered them as history.

The good for nothing secularists hated him because he endeavoured dispassionately to seek socio-religious reform. The debate carried on by the editor of *Thathuva Visarini* is a case to point. Similarly, scholars of scriptures and canons also opposed him. The opposition of Arumuga Navalar, and the court proceedings he launched against Vallalar are instances. Vallalar was not afraid of the internal and external oppositions of the Hindu religion. Believing only in God's Holy Grace, he endeavoured to free mankind from spurious theism and fraudulent atheism, to found an Order of Universal, Pure and Righteous Path, based on Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood.

XIV

THE ASECTIC WHO DID NOT RENOUNCE TAMIL

Saint Ramalinga was a Universal Seer who had renounced all attachments. He was for ever unattached to anything that stood against spiritual love and unity. He was one who ever prayed to God that he should be spared from worldly attachments.

"Lord of miraculous divine light grace who possesses all! Please grant me the Grace, now and for all time, that our heart should not be attached to castes and creeds, their orthodox ways and discriminations, which are obstacles to the Pure and Righteous Path. Please let Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood which is the aim of the Pure and Righteous Path forever flourish among us in ample measure, in all places and in all ways". He preached that this should be the prayer of every individual. Next to God, this great Seer was deeply attached to the Tamil language which was his mother-tongue. But we can not say that only because of that he loved Tamil. He loved it only after his knowing its rare qualities and greatness. As his aim was attaining knowledge of a life without death, he believed that the Tamil language had the ability to give such a knowledge. Because of this, he was deeply interested in Tamil. He prays to God, as though to convey his gratitude to Him for His having given him Tamil as his mother-tongue, thus:

"Thou did not allow me to be interested in any Aryan languages, as they are pompous, high sounding, tedious, deceptive and time-consuming, and were pleased to make me love one of the Southern

languages, Tamil, which is easy to learn and is sweet for composing songs and prayers, and is capable of inculcating the knowledge of immortality, owing to the power of divine grace!"

Saint Ramalinga had a sound scholarship in Sanskrit. He was impeccably learnt in the sound interpretation of Sanskrit scriptures and canons. We know this from his utterance, "you taught and showed me the divine truth from within, in order that I might intuitively learn the art of pristine scriptures." Tradition has it that when Saint Sankaracharya, a contemporary of Ramalinga, had a doubt in a Sanskrit work, he consulted Saint Ramalinga, and he explained to him the true significance.

When Saint Ramalinga stayed in Madras, he met and conversed with Saint Sankaracharya. At that time, Saint Sankaracharya declared that Sanskrit was the mother of all the languages in India. Saint Ramalinga followed, by emphasising that Tamil was the father of all the Indian languages. Our Saint's paraphrastic explanation of the meaning of themanse, "Tamil", on a pure Siddhantic basis, is published as a separate essay in the *Great Book of Thiruarutpa* (Balakrishna Pillai's 3rd Edition). Here are a few sections:

"Tamil consists of five basic syllsbles - *th* - *a* - *m* - *i* - *zh*, and it is cherished by men of yore as a language taught by God and as the father-tongue of all languages, and always thought of for its sweetness and natural greatness."

"*Thiruvasakam*, *Thevaram* and *Thirumanthiram*, indited by great men like Manickavasaka, Sambandha, Thirunavukkarasu, Sundarar and Thirumoolar, contain Universal Truths." While thus talking about the qualities of his mother tongue, he also compares it to Sanskrit and speaks of its superiority thus: "Only the Tamil language very easily contributes to the pure experience of Shiva."

When Saint Sankaracharya declared that "Sanskrit was the mother of all languages", Saint Ramalinga did not refute it. This shows he did not have any dislike for Sanskrit. But then it is praiseworthy that by declaring that if Sanskrit is the "mother-tongue", then Tamil is the "father-tongue", he placed Tamil on a par with supreme Sanskrit.

We should remember here that Caldwell's work, *Comparative Grammar of Dravidian Languages* was not published during Saint Ramalinga's time. However, the Saint had emphasised with proofs of research that "Tamil was a languagex that could function by itself and that it was the father of all languages."

Our Saint's exposition of the importance of the Tamil language to Saint Sankaracharya would alone demonstrate his love for his mother-tongue. There are those among us today, who while they go about speaking "nationalism" and "inter-nationalism", declare their dislike of their mother-tongue. Vallalar was a "Universal Teacher" who transcended the meanness of these people, to find spiritual love and unity. Only to work for that, he founded the Movement for the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path. He had driven home to the people of the world that "the love of the mother-tongue could not be renounced, and it is one that should not be renounced." Though the Saint had learnt Sanskrit, the only language that was enshrined in his heart was Tamil.

The view that only Sanskrit was the "divine language" was a sectarian one among religionists. Following this view, only Sanskrit is used as the language of worship at temples. The demand for carrying on prayer in Tamil is being firmly turned down.

Heads of the Saivite religion, declared both Sanskrit and Tamil as "divine languages." Saint Appar describes God as "one who is the music of Sanskrit and Tamil."

"He is the God.
Oh, He is far above the Gods.
He is the Sanskrit of the North
and the Tamil of the South.
He is the four Vedas."

Further, in these lines, he sees God as a coalescence of Sanskrit and Tamil, and this he demonstrates to us. Besides, he sings of God as "the one who created the Aryans and the Tamils" and announces that God is the Creator of Tamil Prose, Poetry and Drama, and the Four Vedhas."

Hailing from the Vedhic community, Saint Gnanasambandha spread "the greatness of Tamil by singing daily thus:

"Worship the Lord at ancient Pugalur
And remove the darkness of the drowsy heart,
Playing the beautiful strings of
Tamil, the divine Sanskrit and languages all."

He stressed that like Sanskrit, Tamil also was a divine language. Also singing thus:

"Devotees extol His flower-like feet.
Tamil and Sanskrit take shelter in the shade of His feet,"

he pointed out that both the languages attained equality at "the feet of God".

With a view to bringing about a reconciliation between Sanskrit and Tamil, Saivite religious Heads placed them on a footing of equality. They declared both as divine languages. However, their attempt to reconcile them did not bear fruit. Later the quarrel grew and the contention that Sanskrit alone was the Divine Language, strengthened. A counter-argument that Tamil was better than Sanskrit was born. But Saivite seers who excelled in following the path of divine devotion did not wish to create an antagonism in the realm of language. They were keen only to destroy it. Declaring that "Sanskrit had the power to express moral truths, and Tamil had the characteristics to foster devotion to God", Saint Sivaprakasa of Thuraimangalam endeavoured to seek a reconciliation in this linguistic quarrel. In his *Naalvar Naanmani Maalai*, he classifies the different advantages, thus:

"The sweet *Thiruvasakam* uttered by Manickavasaka,
As it is recited by all, is like a golden vessel,
The Vedas are like earthen vessel.
Bliss can be attained by reciting *Thiruvasakam.*
Virtue can be attained by reciting the Vedas.

" The Vedas, the sacred utterances of
The Triple-Eyed Lord who gave Half of Himself to His Consort,

Or the *Thiruvasakam*, the sweet honey given by
Manickavasaka who extols the fame of the Lord, the Source,
If ye want to know which is greater,
We do not see anyone shedding tears or melting at heart
while reciting the Vedas.

But if one recites the *Thiruvasakam*, even once,
The stony heart too will melt,
Tears will flow from the eyes as from a spring,
And the body will be thrilled in ecstasy.
There is none in this world full of people
Who shall not become a devotee
after reciting the *Thiruvasakam*."

Declaring that "only the Tamil language offers very easily the experience of Lord Shiva", Saint Ramalinga emphasises that for following the path of devotion, only the Tamil language is more advantageous than Sanskrit.

Many wise men who sought to reform religion, though they were well-read in Sanskrit, appeared to show a distaste somewhat towards Sanskrit. The founder of Brahma Samaj, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who hailed from the Brahmin community, had deep erudition in Sanskrit; however, he was not well-disposed towards it. But this did not mean, he respected and valued less the glory of Sanskrit. He was not well-disposed towards it because of the way it was used by a few. In those days, all philosophic knowledge lay buried in Sanskrit and it was prevented from being transferred to the languages which people spoke. Swami Vivekananta who was very proficient in Sanskrit states this clearly:

"Our religious works are full of great sayings which give knowledge essential for a spiritual life. They are now in places—monasteries and woods, and with a few peop le-beyond the reach of ordinary people. They lie buried in Sanskrit, written many thousands of years ago, which the ordinary people can not follow. Those rare thoughts should be made to reach all. Every son and daughter of India should possess them as their own, whether they know Sanskrit or not."

"Their being found in Sanskrit makes them very difficult to be propagated. Unless all become well-versed in Sanskrit, this difficulty can not be removed."

"All my life I have been learning Sanskrit. However, each book appears new even to me. How difficult it will be for ordinary people to study them. Therefore, these thoughts should be translated into their own languages."

(*Indian Lectures* pp. 183-4.)

What Saint Ramalinga said of the Aryan language, Sanskrit,... "It is a language that is pompous high-sounding, tedious, greatly deceptive, and time consuming," is approved by Vivekanandha who came after him.

It became an established convention during the middle period that the Sanskrit language and the scriptures and canons in it should be learnt only by a particular class of people, and others should listen to them, only by their teaching! A few of the orthodox among the Sanskrit scholars declared that the works in Sanskrit, because they were in the divine language, should not be translated into the state languages of the people. Therefore, the scriptures and canons of the Hindu religion could not belong to all the Hindus. Apart from the difficulty in people learning them through Sanskrit, communal prejudices deterred them from learning them, even if they came forward to do so, owing to their love of religion. Thus, knowledge of religious works became the privilege of a particular class of people.

This situation contributed to a dislike of Sanskrit. Even Swami Vivekanandha was not exempted from this. Here is an example:

"If a *Sutra* listens to the scriptures, pour molten lead into his ears. If he remembered even a line, cut off his tongue. Such horrible and brutal utterances are found in some books. It is needless to say that these are brutal and ghastly. Such evil spirits were there even before, as they are in existence at all times."

(*Indian Lectures*, p. 192.)

Such fanatic thoughts of religious intolerance found in some Sanskrit works were responsible for greatmen to detest Sanskrit. Lord Buddha, the greatest reformer, hating Sanskrit, spread those great thoughts of Sanskrit, in *Pali*, the people's language.

During the time of our Saint who was a socio-religious reformer, Christian and Islamic religions, spread in Tamil Nadu, every day. The Christian and the Muslims had the right to learn their scriptures—the *Bible* and the *Khurran*—and teach them to others, in their own respective languages. Comparing this situation with that in which all the Hindus could not have the right to learn and teach their scriptures, Vallalar was probably saddened.

Bharati, erudite in scriptures, and aware of this drawback, showed the way to remove it.

"The members of the Brahmin community are the guardians of a wealth of knowledge of a particular society of people. They are the cultivators of the plant of knowledge. Learning on their own whatever scriptures that could possibly be learnt by them, they should, as a matter of obligation teach them to the various communities. To teach thus, no money should be collected, except for food. (*Gnanaratham*)

Thiru Vee. Kalyanasundaram furnishes in his book, *Gandhiji and Humanity*, the following views of Gandhiji on some of the backward ideas in Sanskrit works.

"Remembering the letter of the scriptures for meaning, the priests had forgotten the meaning."

"In the superstitious belief that all that is found in Sanskrit are divine utterances, we are confused. Eradicating such a supersition, let us get rid of the mean thought that women are inferior."

"I do not have faith in what the Laws of Manu had said about the creation of the world and other related matters. As a result of my reading that work, even athiestic thoughts sprouted to some extent."

In the Order of spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood that the Saint founded, he did not approve of differences of castes, creeds, religions, communities and sects. However, only difference in languages was sanctioned, as such a difference was according to the order of Nature, and which is God's creation. So, he accepted that difference. But he did not approve of linguistic controversies and confrontations. In this regard, the Saint was not in agreement with the dislike of Sanskrit. He considered it as an obstacle to spiritual love and unity.

It was because of Saint Ramalinga's eager interest in equality and in socio-religious reforms that he pointed out the defects in the Sanskrit language. In this respect, he may be said to have followed Buddha and Raja Ram Mohan Roy.

It is worthwhile to bear in mind that even Soviet Russia, which stands as a pioneer in the world for the fraternal unity of the working class, had not constitutionally approved religious and class distinctions, prevalent in capitalist society, but had only approved of linguistic differences on which basis the Soviet Union had established its republic.

Whatever had happened in the mediaeval age in the name of Sanskrit, they disappeared as falsehoods, dreams and old legends. To-day, the Sanskrit language belongs not only to the Hindus, but to the whole of humanity. Even the "Whites", considered as "vile" by the orthodox Brahmins who were read in scriptures, had learnt the Sanskrit language, and after attaining a deep erudition in the canons and scriptures of that language, had even carried on research. People like Max Muller and Caldwell are examples for this. The right of learning and reciting Sanskrit works naturally belonged once to the Brahmin community, among the four castes, but today there is none to object to the other three communities attaining and enjoying that right. Breaking the laws of Manu, even women are learning Sanskrit.

We know that Doctor Ambedhkar, hailing from Saint Nandhanar's community, learnt Sanskrit and studied the philosophy of the scriptures and canons through that language.

The four Vedas, their gospels and tenets are being brought out in the respective language of the people, in Tamil particularly—without opposition. In this respect, the members of the *Arya Samaj* have done yeoman service.

Which are the Divine Languages?

Apart from the original works in Sanskrit, books of uptodate interpretations and criticisms are being published. To state further, a large number of Brahmins, forgetting their scriptures, have transferred their devotion from Sanskrit to the English Language. Bharati also states this in his lyric, *Maravan Pattu*:

"In former days the Brahmins recited the scripture,
It rained thrice a month.
These days they observe only falsehood.
They seek money for anything they do."

The views or criticisms of revolutionary reformers like Buddha, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and Saint Ramalinga, on Sanskrit, are only facts in the history of the past and not guides to us of the present day.

Modern research acumen, developed in the field of languages, does not accept any language as a divine one. That all languages were born with the people and were fostered by them is a fact expert linguistic researchers have established, and this can not be refuted.

Vallalar's reviewing of the difficulties of learning Sanskrit, with distasteful feelings, is not to encourage the rejection of the philosophic principles and moral and ethical thoughts found in that language. It must be held that he wanted those to be learnt through Tamil. That was also true. The Saint's *Arutperunjothi Ahaval* (*Ode on the Supreme Light Divine*), *Mahadeva Malai* (*A Garland of Songs on the Supreme God*) and *Jeevakarunya Ozhukkam* (*The Discipline of Compassion*) are only distillations of the philosophies and morals from Sanskrit works.

All in Tamil

Saint Ramalinga showed a mental outlook of amity in everything He wished to seek harmony, not only among religions, castes and creeds, but also among all deeds which were at strife with each other. In this regard, we may boldly say he desired a harmony between Sanskrit and Tamil on an equal basis.

Though Saint Ramalinga believed that it was possible to learn through Tamil all the spiritual knowledge and wisdom, he accepted Sanskrit as a cultural *lingua franca*, to unite various language-speakers in the realm of philosophy. Though English had spread in Tamil Nadu to some extent, Vallalar probably thought that the English language was not conducive to unity on a philosophic basis. Therefore at the school for scriptures which he conducted at Vadaloor, he had arranged for the teaching of Sanskrit also, along with Tamil and English.

Saint Ramalinga had realised that a love of pure Tamil, without an admixture of Sanskrit words, was not possible in the realm of religion. If we have to teach modern scientific knowledge in Tamil we have to borrow technical terms from English. Similarly, if we have to teach Vedhanta and Siddhanta philosophies in Tamil, we have to, borrow technical terms from Sanskrit. As he realized this fact, he mixed the required technical words in Sanskrit with Tamil and composed the *Songs of Divine Grace* As an example, let us inspect two songs from *Mahadeva Malai* (*A Parland of Songs on the Supreme God*):

"Thou art the State of Vedanta and the Truth of Siddhanta,
Thou art the Universal Wisdom and the Realm of Nadanta,
Thou art the Centre of all philosophies and Thou art beyond the Nine States,
Thou art the Source of the myriad worlds and the Bliss of the Supermind,
Oh, Great Lord!
Thou shine forever amidst the space of silence,
Transcending the codes of disputed creeds.

Thou art the truths of Duality in Monism,
Qualified Monism, Absolute Monism,
Pure Monism and Universal Monism.
Thou art without any other basis but the Self.
Thou art the Eternal Existence and the Consciousness beyond comparison.
Oh, Great Lord!
Thou art the Mother who giveth all.
Thou art the Father, the Mentor and the Divine."

Also, the entire composition, *Thiruvadi Pugazhchi* (*In Praise of the Lord's Holy Feet*), consisting of 128 lines, was written like Sanskrit verses, in Tamil. Let us sample a few lines:

" The Supreme Being, the Suffusion of Wisdom,
The Perfect, the Felicity of Divine Experience,

The Supreme Treasure, the Supreme Happiness,
The Suffusion of Self, the Spiritual and Eternal Bliss,
The State of True, Supreme and Sole End,
The Supreme Enlightenment, the Supreme Goodness and Greatness,
The Supreme Truth, the Incomparable and the Formless,
And the Source and the Basis of the Elements and the Elementals."

Here is a song, in mixed ditties of Tamil and Sanskrit in equal proportions.

"Oh, Kanna! Thou who hast a dark blue complexion like the clouds and the sapphire,
Thou who carry the renowned chank and the wheel!
Thou whose mouth is like a beautiful and pure flower!
Oh, beloved Sri Rama!
Extoling Thy Name alone will give a virtuous life
Oh, heart!
Hail Damodhara! Hail Narayana!
Hail Vamana! Hail Kesava!"

In Pure Tamil

Except for a few hundred philosophic songs, many thousands of devotional songs were composed by Vallalar in pure Tamil, without mixture of many Sanskrit words. Here is an example:

"Oh Thou who art the green bowed tree that offers shade to the weary during summer!
Oh, Thou who art the cool shade of the tree!
Oh, Thou who art the fruit that ripens in the shade!
Oh, Thou who art the delightful water that flows in the brook!
Oh, Thou who art the fragrant flower that blooms amidst the pleasant water!
Oh, Thou who art the gentle, refreshing breeze that wafts over the balcony!'
Oh, Thou who art the bliss born of the soft breeze!

Oh, Thou who art the fruit of the bliss!

Oh, Lord, Thou who wedded me during my playful age!

Oh, Cosmic Dancer! Deign to wear my garland of verses."

Ramalinga Vallalar sang of his deep love for Tamil thus:

" Oh, Sea of virtute!
Thou who taketh as virtue even the great blunders
Of those who sing Thy praise in beautiful Tamil.
Thou let me rejoice in delight,
Making me sing of Thee, my Father,
In the assembly of true devotees,
And Thou foster devotion in pure Tamil."

The self-same thought of Vallalar is emphasised by Saint Arunagiri in his line: "Lord Muruga will bless even (his) detractors who blame him in the Triple Tamil of Prose, Verse and Drama.

Lyrics with a Musical Felicity

Saint Ramalinga was the foremost among the great men in the 19th century who contributed to the music of Tamil.

There are those even today who declare that there are no lyrics in Tamil with a musical felicity. Even a century ago, the Saint composed lyrical songs in Tamil, which should be described as a contribution to the development of Tamil.

Saint Ramalinga did not approve of sounding musical instruments during worship. Because of this, it should not be construed that he was averse to the music of Tamil. He who sang of God thus:

"Thou knoweth the misery I felt
Even after enjoying good music and dance."

also said:

"Without praising the Lord by ourselves, getting some one else to offer prayers in another language, without knowing the meaning, is not as appropriate." As musical instruments were a hindrance to

our praying to God and worshipping him, he did not approve of them. Would the great Saint who composed musical verses be an enemy to musical instruments? It is said that he also had the musical knowledge to sing lays. His lyrical songs are an example of this.

Tamil prose had not developed adequately during the time of Vallalar. He removed that defect also by giving a new life to Tamil prose, as he had learnt it by intuition. *Manu Needhi Murai Kanda Vasakam* was the first book of prose which the Saint wrote. His prose was simple and sweet and it could be enjoyed by not only pundits but also the common folk. As an example, let us see in *Manu Needhi Murai Kanada Vasakam*, his reference in prose to the words of Manuneedhi Cholan, uttered in pain, when he heard that this son Veedhi Vidangan had driven his chariot on a calf and killed it:

"From the beginning of my rule till now, all lives existed in happiness in every way. I thought I had received the blessings of Lord Shiva to rule thus in just ways, under my fair secptre. Even a short while go, I was so happy, but all that is gone now to dust!"

"Afraid of blames and bad deeds, I ruled, without transgressing moral laws. Like sudden wealth to the man who was poor for a long time, a boy was born to me by the blessings of Lord Shiva. He too to the joy of the learned, attained knowledge and inculcation, and also culture and maturity. Oh! How I was proud and haughty that I had no more care hereafter! How happy I was as a pure parent! How I dreamt that as he was fit for succession, he should marry! How I built castles in the air in happiness that my son was so full of noble qualities that he would justify my name! When a young calf came against his way, he drove the chariot on it, as though he lost his thought in blindness, and received irretrievable blame."

"Alas! without being my fond son to hold my sceptre after me, he became a short lived son! Oh! I myself laugh at the thought that I rule justly! Is my sceptre, which allowed the killing of a tender calf in the street, a measure of my justice! Is it a sceptre or mere pen?

Is it a pair of scissors? Is it a gimmy? Is it a blind man's pole? It is a pole of injustice? Is it a broomstick? A stick for the steelyard? Or a wooden pole? Is it a stalk of hay? Or is it a pole to be

used to turn the dead calf while burning it? Oh! what am I to think of it?"

Vallalar had written several other works in prose. All of them are expositions and petitions. In a debate among scholars on whether it is *Thondamandalam*, or *Thondaimandalam*, the Saint ruled that it was *Thondamandalom*. In this regard, he brought out in prose the work of Padikkasu Pulavar, called *Thondamandala Sathakam*, under the name of *The Grammar of the Names of Old Works — A Hymn of Prayers to God*. His thoughtful prose works like *Discipline of Kindness to All Living Beings and Righteous Entreaties* exemplify the greatness of his prose style.

The First Among the Three!

Three great men — Saint Ramalinga, Jaffna Nalloor Arumuga Navalar, and Mayuram Vedhanayagam Pillai — gave a new life to 19th century Tamil prose style. They were not only contemporaneous, but also roughly of the same age. Vallalar was ten months younger than Navalar. Vedhanayagam Pillai was three years junior to Vallalar

It was in 1854 that Vallalar brought out his work, *Manumurai Kanda Vasakam*. Earlier, in 1851, he published *Ozhivilodukkam* together with his gloss in prose for the song-offerings.

It was after 1856 that Arumuga Navalar published his prose-works.

Only in 1862 that Mayuram Vedhanayagam Pillai published his translation in prose of a Tamil work. In 1876 only, his novel *Prathaba Mudaliar, Charithiram* was published. Thus, of the three, to have the credit of contributing to the growth of Tamil, Saint Ramalinga stands first and as a guide to the other two. This has been authoritatively approved by the *Tamil Encyclopaedia*, published with the support of the Government, as indicated here:

"In the 19th century, Saint Ramalinga was a leading light in the realm of religion. Though what he sang were devotional songs, many of them, were full of literary qualities. A collection of these songs was known as *Songs of Divine Grace*. They were composed in a simple and easy style, with deep feelings."

"A work of his, *The Discipline of Compassion to Living Beings*, shows the richness of his prose-style."

"As one of the world's wisemen, his songs serve to illustrate his simple style, and explain his great thoughts."

(Vol. 5, p. 448.)

Saint Ramalinga had attained incomparable and immense scholarship not only in the Tamil literature of the Sangam and Puranic Age, but also in *Tholkappium*, a work in Tamil grammar, more than three thousand years old. This can be seen in his expositions. When Mahavidhwan Meenakshisundaram Pillai known as the 20th century Kambar, was in conversation with Jaffna Arumuga Navalar, it was said, that he remarked:

"If Saint Ramalinga had not become an ascetic, but had become a "Navalar" or a "Vidhvan", you would not have become famous as a grammarian". Saint Ramalinga was called by the great scholars of his time, *Divine Teacher*, well-versed in the Triple Tamil of Prose, Verse and Drama.

The Credit goes to Caldwell

Saint Ramalinga had planned to write and publish many philosophic works in prose. He had catalogued and announced them in the publication of the first five canons of the *Songs of Divine Grace.* Here is the list:

1. Exposition of Kalandha
2. Exposition of Yogandha
3. Exposition of Nadhandha
4. Exposition of Bhodhandha
5. Exposition of Vedhantha
6. Exposition of Siddhantha
7. Exposition of the Universe
8. Exposition of the Body
9. The Pure Realm of Shiva
10. The Universal Realm of Shiva
11. A Collection of Sacred Incantations

12. Great Sayings
13. Universal Scripture
14. Exposition of the Spiritual
15. Exposition of the Material
16. Prose Kinds
17. Kinds of Logic
18. Kinds of Wisdom
19. Exposition of Grammar
20. Dialectics
21. Exposition of Tamil
22. Exposition of Sanskrit
23. Traditions of Art.

If Saint Ramalinga had published these works, the Tamil language would have made rapid strides, in religion, and more particularly in philosophic sciences. Especially, if atleast the *Expositions of Tamil and Sanskrit* had come out, there would have been opportunities for augumenting knowledge in research on these two languages. It was the misfortune of the Tamil lauguage that we had bidden goodbye to the Sage of Vadaloor, before the publication of these works. Therefore the credit of launching a study of comparative research in Tamil and Sanskrit had gone to the European, Caldwell!

A Great Scholar Amazed!

Even Saint Sankaracharya was amazed by Saint Ramalinga's scholarship in Sanskrit, Mahavidhvan Meenakshisundaram Pillai was likewise amazed by his scholarship in Tamil. Once, Thiru Pillai approached the Saint and requested him to explain the first ode of Manickavasaka's *Thiruvasakam.* Accordingly, for the first consonant '*n*', in the first word, *Namasivaya*, in the first Ode, he spoke for two hours, finding upto sixty four characteristics for that one single letter. It was said that the puzzled scholar, not being able to retain them in his memory, left, showing deep respect to the Saint, by saying that he had "no more ability to listen to any further interpretations."

In fine, Ramalinga Vallalar was a savant in the twin languages of Tamil and Sanskrit. He was a Prince of Poets, a Publisher of Tamil Works, a Commentator, an Interpreter, a Prose-writer, a Preacher-Teacher, and a combination of all these.

XV

SPIRITUAL LOVE AND UNITY

Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace raised a new slogan, *Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood.* On the basis of that call, he tried to foster brotherly feelings among living beings. Among the many ideals of Vallalar, the chiefest that imbibed and exemplified all the other ideals, was Spiritual Love and Unity. The Saint himself declared that the main aim of the Pure and Righteous Path was Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood.

Saint Thayumanava described those who did not follow the code of the Righteous Path as the "Followers of the Evil Path". We can know this from his appeal to God to "over master these Evil Path Followers also, by giving them Grace." What he emphasised here was the "RighteousPath" — of Siddhantic - Vedhantic principles of religion. But Vallalar taught the new code of the Universal and Pure Righteous Path that transcended religion.

Spiritual Love and Unity of Mankind

Lives reside in various kinds of bodies. They are characterized as humans, animals, birds, reptiles, marine life and plants. It is a religious belief that these are living souls created by the Supreme Soule. Therefore, Vallalar found it his duty to see a spiritual love and unity among these living beings. Valluvar said; "The primal Lord leads the world". Keeping Him as the Chiefest, Vallalar desired to found a society of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood. About this,

Vallalar offers the following explanation, in his *Discipline of Compassion to Living Beings*.

"All souls are embodied in the 'One Unity' of different Natural Forms of God. By Power of His Divine Grace, this One Unity becomes various physical bodies. Therefore, these souls belong to a Universal Kind."

"As all souls are created by the one Unity of Natural Form—the Almighty God—they belong to a Universal Brotherhood."

The two sections, as shown above, though they underscore the same thought, in the former the saint refers to all lives as belonging to one kind, and in the latter, he points out that the oneness of the kind finds naturally a universal brotherhood.

The Clarion Call

"We should show love to all living beings." This is "compassion to living beings." Saint Ramalinga goes a step further, forgetting all the physical differences, to declare that all living beings belong to the same kind—the kind, unified by spiritual love. On this basis Vallalar endeavoured to create a new world, with the Religion of Love. He prayed to God that he should see such a world to his heart's delight.

In the following lines, Saint Ramalinga visualises his ideal:

"When will the day come for the world
To prosper in bliss and beatitude,
To become one with God,
Following with love the virtue of grace
And rejecting the sensual pleasures?
Oh, Divine Giver!
When will this humble self rejoice at such a sight?
I know not and I am sad.
Oh, Divine Radiance!
Thy holy heart knoweth my misery.
Need I tell Thee often?

This is the hour for the multitudes of this world
To unite in spiritual love.
This is my clarion call."

The Saint's Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood was a philosophy that transcended differences, or was one that was without differences. Yes! Spiritual love and Unity was one that annulled differences of God, religion, caste, creed and community, and transcended languages, lands, and colour discriminations.

The philosophy of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood militates against the superstition of preaching various Gods. That is why he gives this trumpet-call to the whole world, thus:

"Besides the myriad creeds on this earth,
There are several codes,
Like the lofty Vedanta, Siddhanta and Nadanta.
In all the codes,
I see only Shiva and nothing else.
Ye great men!
Proclaim if ye see anything else."

He exhorts those who do not understand the truth that "God is one" thus: When will ye ever attain the realization that God is one?" "Let all the world live well in unity, realizing that Shiva is one." Here the Saint refers to the Infinite Spirit, as Shiva, the Lord of all living kind.

God is Love! God is All!

God as conceived by Vallalar is beyond name and form. Let us hear what the Saint himself states:

"In reality, God is all the world: He is Love. He creates and establishes the condition of perfect peace and harmony in everything in the world."

Wise men of yore said, "God is Love". Saint Ramalinga who sought a world-unity, added: "God is Love", "God is All the world."

Saint Ramalinga refuses to accept anything that stands as an obstacle to the fostering of unity among human beings, as divine power or divine sanction.

Saint Ramalinga hated all the religions of the world. He endeavoured to see a unity of all the people belonging to those religions. This was his common ideal. However, he attempted to seek support to his ideals, only from among the religions of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism which were born and establised in India. He did not mention anything openly about the Islamic and Christian religions. But this did not mean that he wished to unify only Indian religions. We may have to say that though he wanted to attract Islam and Christianity towards his ideals, he left that to time and God. Vallalar was a diplomat who did not wish to enlarge his ground for a battle of ideas.

The Unity that Adhi Sankara Found

The gathering of one group against the unity of another group can not become spiritual love and universal brotherhood. We have to describe it only as instinct for self-preservation. The Saint's insistence on unity was not for seeking protection for a group. It was only for seeking a *One World.*

Adhi Sankara tried to seek a unity among the six sectarian groups of the Hindu religion.

Adhi Sankara's attempt at seeking a religious unity was a step taken by him to unify the Hindus, to protect them (the Hindu religion) from the attacks of Jainism and Buddhism which had earned his dislike and antagonism. But that was not the aim of Vallalar. He endeavoured only to see a unity of mankind, without any religion. He dreamt that this unified humanity, believing in one God should free itself from the evil of divisive and fissiperous forces, and should show love to all living beings. That is why he did not declare, "Hindu Love and Brotherhood", or "Human Love and Brotherhood", but gave the call for "Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood". The call was new, but the aim contained in it was not new to the world.

The Failure of our Forefathers

All those, considered as Religious Heads and Prophets of the

world, endeavoured to bring the whole world under the same moral code. But Time isolated them and created many religions. Therefore, every code or every movement, became a separate religion in the course of time, and defeated the dream of "the one-world" of these who created those religions.

Apart from these religious heads and seers, emperors also attempted to bring the whole world under a single control, and failed. As a result, many kingdoms came into being. Perhaps, the love of leadership was also responsible for those emperors to establish a world-empire. However, we can not deny that they were also aware of a one-world-concept.

Saints and kings failed, because their 'one-world' endeavour was not based on spiritual love and universal brotherhood.

Religions which began with the concept of one-world, began to fight among themselves, and brought harm to their own cherished goal of world-unity. They became perennial obstacles to the fruition of that sacred aim. That is why the Leader of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path said that as long as religions were not destroyed, it was not possible that spiritual love and unity should be born, or that the people of all the world could be united into a single community.

Religions might be ever so many, but if there was a unity of aim in them, Vallalar could not have hated religions. As pointed by Saint Thayumanava, religion during Vallalar's time, was in the mean state of "saying one thing and doing another." Therefore, Vallalar tried to seek the unity of mankind, by eradicating religion.

All Religions are Acceptable

Vallalar believed in the harmony of all religions. He reveals this in these lines from the *Song of Divine Grace*:

> "Knowing that all religions shine in the state of Thy divine grace,
> I make all of them acceptable to me."

What he refers to here by "all religions", is not religious establishments, but only religious philosophies. In tune with this aim, he

created a philosophy of universal equality, called *Shadhantha*, reconciling the six principles of *Siddhantha*, *Vedhantha*, *Nadhantha*. *Kalantha*, *Yogantha*, and *Bodhantha*.

Adhi Sankara unified the six sectarian creeds of Hinduism. As Hinduism alone was very powerful throughout India during his time he could have thought that uniting the inner sects themselves was a task of national integration.

The Islamic and Christian religions, several centuries after Adhi Sankara, and during the time of Vallalar, held sway over the Hindu religion and established themselves in India, with the help of their Governments. Therefore, Vallalar endeavoured to integrate not only Jainisms and Buddhism, which were alien to Hindu religion, but also Islam and Christianity which were alien to India itself.

Islam and Christianity

The chief reason for the Saint's spreading of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood, first among the religions of India, was because he thought that only India was very close to the idea of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood. Swamy Vivekanandha also confirms his;

"The truth, "Love all men as you will love yourself", is uttered in every land. We do not distinguish between human and other lives."

"Why should we love all lives as we love ours? The scriptures elsewhere do not explain this. The reason is found only here (in our country). As God, is without form and suffuses all lives, (to us) all lives are equal!"

(*Indian Lectures*, p. 32.)

Apart from emphasising that "God is one", the philosophy of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood, declares that "God suffuses all lives."

Man, animal, bird, reptile, plant and that which lives in water differ only on the basis of the body. There is no connexion between the soul and those differences, believes, Saint Ramalinga.

Those who do not realize that God suffuses all lives are those who have not the ability to experience the divine in themselves. Vallalar says:

"As compassion to lives flourishes naturally in all lives, God can not manifest himself either from within or without, in those lives in whom it does not naturally flourish."

(*Discipline of Compassion to Living Beings*, *p*.3)

The Mistake of Bhanukavi

P.T, Bhanukavi, the editor of *Niyaaya Vachira Kudaaram*, in refuting the opponents of *Arutpa* states thus:

"The utterance of Vallalar and others that "all religions are acceptable", is only a reference to the religions of scriptures and canons". That is, according to him, "Vallalar accepted those religions which followed the scriptures and canons! If this is true, then alien religions like Jainism, Buddhism and Christianity would be outside the society of spiritual love and unity which Vallalar wished to establish. Bhanukavi's interpretation is contrary to the vision of Vallalar. Perhaps only to appease the Saivites who were antagonistic to the *Arutpa*, he gave this mistaken interpretation. The following verses show how his views were contrary to the ideals of Vallalar:

"Oh, dear girl!
You ask me to utter the sacred name of my consort,
He who has immense grace,
He who is incomparable,
And He who dances in the midst of the Universe,
I shall call Him,
God Pure, the Enlightened, the Source of All,
The Divine Splendour, the Lord Protector
One who has Supreme Power, the Source of Bliss,
Eternal Felicity, the Consort of Sakti,
God Infinite, God Supreme, God Absolute,
Infinite Bliss, Universal Spirit and Pure Bliss,
Such is the divine play.

Oh, dear girl!
You ask me,
Will the names of other religions suit Him, who dances in the Hall of wisdom.
Know ye that the names of all other religions are His names.
What name will not suit Him who is named the Eccentric?
Not only the names of the deities of other religions,
Your name and mine too are His.
The names of all other lives are His indeed!
My dear friend!
It will be clear to you when you witness,
Even one sacred dance of enlightement
That my consort doth perform in the Hall of Wisdom."

These are the verses of Saint Ramalinga, in the guise of the heroine talking to the hero. In the first, Vallalar refers to Arugar - Buddha as the same names of the God he worships. "As those are from alien religions, how could they be applied to the Lord of Chidambaram, who is worshipped according to the codes of scriptures and canons?", the heroine seems to ask. The Saint finds in the names of the later religions the same God he found in the name, of Arugar - Buddha of earlier religions. It is certain that by "later regions" the Saint refers only to Islam and Christianity which came to India, grew and established themselves at a later point of time. Therefore, the Saint's declaration that "all religions are acceptable", also refers to Islam and Christianity. Saint Ramalinga who declared, "Let the whole world prosper in unity", could not have desired a world-unity, without Islam and Christianity.

XVI

THE REIGN OF THE RIGHTEOUS PATH

Is there place for patriotism in the world of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood? Vallalar says 'yes' to this question. But he imposes a condition. He says that patriotism should not be an obstacle to world-unity.

Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar declared that Saint Ramalinga had preached as follows at Siddhivalagam:

"Accepting the essential principle of a world-brotherhood, we should endeavour to establish a moral brotherhood". It will be clear from this utterance that the Saint had accepted the principle of national integration. What the Sage of Vadaloor described as a "Moral-Brotherhood" was what the Sage of Wardha emphasised in the words, "National Integration". It will be evident that if the unity of Indians is a "moral" act, then the attempt to disunite them, is an immoral one.

Moral Brotherhood

Saint Ramalinga had not spelt out the details as to how, when and in what manner the world-unity should fructify. Perhaps he thought that the world-leaders who came after him would fulfil that task. That is why he exhorted Indian Nationalists to accept the essential principle of the brotherhood of all the world.

Saint Ramalinga too should have understood the fact that India consisted of many races, or that, it was a sub-continent, with

lands of many races. That is why he said, "India should endeavour to establish a moral-brotherhood." That is, "to find a unity in diversity" was the principle of the "moral-brotherhood."

It is worthwhile for the present generation to note that Saint Ramalinga considered India as one land. Yes. In the world of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood, it is not possible for any race to live separately. This is the political philosophy of the Pure and Righteous Path. Those who repudiate or abhbor this are those who wish to 'fence off' the Himalayas or the Vindhyas! They would certainly be not those who wish to emulate Saint Ramalinga. The world-politics which the Saint visualized was a bond of fraternity and unity.

The Cruel Rule

At his level, Saint Ramalinga wished to live a life of Divine Grace. Beyond this, by involving himself in worldly affairs, or in world-politics, he did not desire to seek fame. He mentions this in the lines in *Pillai Siru Vinnappam* (*The Humble Entreaty from the Son*) that "he did not wish to flourish as a famous man in the whole world".

"I have no desire in this world
For the joy of ruling over people,
Or for other joys, however great they may be.
I loath to think of them."

Apart from stating that he did not relish the fame that accrued when involved in politics, he declared that when he thought of it, he was revolted by it. However, owing to his love for the people of the world, he keenly desired the establishment of the rule of the righteous path seekers, in place of the perpetrators of evil, in politics. He introduces his political aim in the following verses:

"May the rule sans compassion vanish swiftly,
May the righteous, soliciting divine grace, rule,
May the good and the pure attain all they wish,
May all think good and live in harmony."

It was the Saint's faith that the rule of monstrous people who are relentless, and murderous in their craze for war, should be put an end to.

Fairness in Politics

There should be a balance in everything. This is very essential in politics. Even in Vallalar's time, the rulers, without being fair, and owing to selfishness, created havoc throughout the world. The embodiment of love that Vallalar was, whenever he saw such heartless rulers, he was greatly vexed at heart:

"Mother, Oh, Mine!
For ever so many days
Grace never reached those crowds
That had no sense of justice or fairness,
And whenever I saw
The evil and the meanminded who misused power,
And the heinous who spoke nothing but untruth,
I was disturbed at heart.
I was alarmed to see the way of the world
that discards the Pure and Righteous Path."

In today's world, fairness in politics is cherished by the educated. It is followed by righteous nations and governments, even amidst many kinds of trials. Even before a century, the Saint declared that politicians should adopt a code of moral discipline. This is a realization as a result of the Saint's principle of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood. Just as he disliked narrow religious attachment, he also disliked narrow patriotism. Yes. In politics Saint Ramalinga was an internationalist.

Creation and Destruction

When something is attempted to be destroyed, we should try to establish in its place something that is much better. Those who, with out this ability to create, only attempt to destroy, can not be the followers of the Righteous Path.

Righteous Path Seeker that Saint Ramalinga was, he proclaimed, "Let a loveless rule be quickly destroyed". In the same breath, he also declared, "Let good men who have imbibed divine grace, rule." This the Saint's golden saying which he gave to politicians as a sacred utterance.

We can not say that all that the citizen demands will be good. Hence Saint Ramalinga said, "Let all the good that the virtuous thought of, grow!" A rule in which a few are happy, and the many suffer in poverty, can not a good rule. Hence, he blessed: "Let all live in harmony", and let all "desist from thinking evil, and think good", in the noble rule he visualized. In these verses,

"May the wise rule of compassion, avoiding fear, prosper.
May the poisonous serpent and other wicked lives be dead and gone.
May the flag of justice fly high and flourish for long,"

he wishes for a good government which follows the divine path, keeping the citizens free from the fear of hunger, disease and enmity. He sings in exhortation: "Let the flag of justice fly high forever everywhere and in every way."

The Three Great Gospels

"Equality", "Liberty", and "Fraternity" — these were the three great gospels that rang in Europe, during Saint Ramalinga's time. The people were carrying on a revolution to fulfil those ideals. In such an atmosphere, he trumpets that his social philosophy in the world of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood which he visualized, was this: "The high and the low and all, should carry on their worldly life in harmony and unity." Saint Ramalinga says that the unjust practices of the high and the low among the people should go, and that all should live as brothers akin in mind, on the basis of freedom and equality.

During the time of Saint Ramalinga, the British Empire held sway over the whole of India which included the Tamil Land also. Therefore, politicians connected the Saint's declaration, "let the cruel rule quickly end" to the British Empire only. This is true only to some extent. Saint Ramalinga considered the whole world his motherland. Hence, he did not care for the differences of colour and land. Perhaps, his principle was this: "There is nowhere in the world the tradition of a place being ruled over by another. Therefore, his slogan "let the cruel rule quickly end", should be deemed to apply to all the nations of the world. In this respect, the foreign government that was ruling over India was no exception to the Saint's slogan.

In the Midst of Revolution

During the time of Saint Ramalinga, revolution against the British Empire took place in North India. *Teachers* of history, refer to it as "Sepoy Mutiny." When the Saint was thirty four years of age, the revolution occured. A quarter century before his birth, Veerapandiya Kattabomman revolted in Thirunelveli against the White Empire. In those days, transport for easy movement of the people, or apparatus for dessimination of news were not available in plenty. Therefore, it was possible that Vallalar did not know about the great revolution which occured in the North. He could not have also known about the revolution in the South, in Panchalangkurichi. Even fifteen years before, the people of the capital city of Tamil Nadu did not know about the revolution. If that is the situation now, Vallalar a century before had no opportunity of learning about the revolution in Panchalankkurichi.

The great religious reformer Dhayanandha Saraswathy lived during the Sepoy Mutiny in the North. He also had not mentioned anything about the revolution. Until the first half of the 19th century, politics and religion were not separate in the North; they were intertwined. Religionists rendered help to the Hindu rulers who were determined to finish the Moghul Empire, in the Sepoy Revolution, Hindu priests and Muslim Moulvis openly stood by the revolutionaries. But the same condition did not obtain in the latter half of the 19th century. Queen Victoria's proclamation, on behalf of the British Empire, that there would be "no interference with religion", was responsible for this.

An Eye on Reform

Though Ramalinga Vallalar was aware of the sufferings of the people as a result of the British Rule, he did not reveal his anger against it, because he was saddened by the greater hardship which the people experienced in the name of caste, creed and religions. Another reformer, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who lived in the 19th century, also did not oppose the British Rule. With the help of the foreign rule, he was bent upon removing the superstitious habits and customs which were prevlaent among the Hindus for thousands of years. He enacted a law to prevent the wife from committing *Sutee*, when the husband died.

Saint Ramalinga hated more the cruelties perpetrated internally-by caste and creed, than he would the foreign rule. Thus he declared that all the schools in the country should be directly administered by the British Government. He writes as follows to one of his disciples:

"The Pachaiyappa's school in Chidambaram appears to lack discipline now. However, it would be good if the Government were to deal with its administration. On the contrary it is connected with some Hindus who are not united."

(B.K. Pillai, V,5,p. 40.)

Yes, children belonging to low-castes are not admitted into schools run by those of the high castes. Owing to this. education for enlightenment becomes the privilege of the forward communities. Only for ending this injustice, Vallalar said that it was desirable that the British took over the administration of the schools. This had been the view of every social reformer who lived during the British Era.

It is evident that by the Saint's reference to "a few disunited Hindus", he did not like the use of the Pachaiyappa's School exclusively by the Hindus and desired that those from alien religions like Christianity and Islam should also be benefitted by the school. Hence he desired that the responsibility for providing education to the people should be taken up the Government.

Concern for Worldly Life

Though Saint Ramalinga lived as a white-robed ascetic, renouncing all the pleasures of life, he was concerned with worldly life, with a view to serving living beings. He says that God gave him such an i nterest in worldly life. "Thou instinctively inculcated in my humble self, both grace and awareness of worldly life", says Saint Ramalinga. Also. we understand the same from the these lines;

" Good or evil I do not know.
My mind is so much with the Lord of Thillai
That other things of this mundane life are not for me.
Whenever my heart went after worldly affairs,
Only for the sake of compassion to living beings.

That I appealed to Thy Holy Feet anxiously,
And still continue to entreat Thee.

Oh, Supreme Lord! Worshipped by leaders all!
Even today my heart, my unrelenting wisdom,
And my self exist in this mundane world,
Only for the sake of compassion to living beings,
What shall I do?
My soul is nothing but compassion.

Mother, Oh, mine!
I am involved in worldly life
    only because of compassion,
    not because of love of any kind,
I do not have any end in my mind,
    not only now but at any time.
Thou art aware of this indeed!
Need I to state,
Except this love of compassion
I do not have any other defect."

"Except giving, I have no other evil in me", says the Saint who probably thought that his involvement with worldly life was only an unavoidable evil.

To Remain Alone?

The greatmen in the 20th century, who have received divine grace wish only to completely stay away from worldly life, particularly from politics. Saint Ramalinga was not in agreement with this view. Staying away from worldly life, without serving other living beings, and aiming at fulfilling only one's own duties of life, is only selfishness. There is no divine sanction for this aloofness. The Saint preached: "Remain alone." The meaning is neither "existing in idleness" nor "existing only with a view to be selfish". The meaning is: "Be concerned with worldly life. Serve other living beings. At the same, time, remain mentally detached." The Saint's life transpired that way.

"Mother, Oh, Mine!
My keen desire it is
To be the embodiment of compassion,
To offer solace to others,
Relieving their intense agony, fear and miseries.
By Thy grace, Oh, God!
To persevere to make the world follow the code
That renounces meat-eating and killing,
To extol the glory suffusing the Space
And to praise Thee.

I do not have any other desire
Thou who art the Lofty Treasure of Grace,
And who reside within me with Thy Consort!
Thy holy heart knoweth all these indeed."

These verses indicate that he was concerned with worldly life for the purpose of his serving for the good of others, and for the common good of all living kind.

The Rule of Grace

The Saint who founded the great Movement of the Pure and Righteous Path wished for and received the Rule of Grace. God made him the leader of the Realm of the Light of Divine Grace.

"Oh, Lord!
When I struggled without knowing the means,
To devote my mind to Thy tradition
Of the Righteous Path that gives glory,

Thou revealed me the way,
Subjected me to the Thy Rule of Grace,
Offered me the elixir of Divine Light,
And appeared in a beatific vision.
Oh, what shall I offer Thee in return.

Oh, my Lord, my being, apple of my eyes!
Letting all the ruling philosophies
Come under my sway and serve my command,
Letting all realms, below, here and above, praise me,
And letting me state that
In the whole universe and even beyond is my rule,
Thou crowned me.

Oh, Shiva, Thou who enabled me to shine,
Making me the embodiment of bliss,
Deign to adorn Thy pair of golden-flower-feet with my verses."

In the above verses, he declares that his rule of grace holds sway not only over the whole world of so many continents, but the universe, containing within itself all the elements. Seated on the throne of Love, with Virtue as the crown, holding the sceptre of Universality, and with all living beings as his subjects, Saint Ramalinga rules over the Realm of the Righteous Path, as the representative of God.

Kannaki, appearing in a vision, before Saint Ilango who stayed at *Gunavaairkottam*, after abdication of the throne in favour of his brother, said: "Thou King of infinite Bliss, beyond human perception." Like Saint Ilango, Vallalar also was the "King of Infinite Bliss."

Opposition to War

If the rule of human beings is not carried on according to the Code of the Righteous Path, then the Rule of Grace of seers will not flourish. Hence, in the world of politics, Saint Ramalinga wished for the end of the wicked path and the flourishing of the Righteous Path. He therefore sang:

" Oh, Unique and Prime Giver
who shines in the crown of scriptures!
Whenever I heard, as if struck by a hammer,
That rulers of the world killed each other with the help of the sword,

I grew weak and weary, shuddering at heart.
In this noisy world, it is but natural
That I should tremble at the thought of murder."

Only world peace was the Saint's aim. The loss of lives as a result of the defence of a land, was considered by him only as murder. This was a new outlook.

Is Destruction to be Praised?

If one man kills another, that is called murder! The court of justice will sentence him. But if the people of a nation invade another and kill, that is called war! Poets glorify the victor and scorn the vanquished, in songs. This is what the world-rulers found as "rule and law!"

Our Saint describes the loss of lives in political struggles only as "murder". Our Saint's world of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood was a new world that had totally put an end to war-mongering. We should not forget this.

Gandhiji who led a great struggle for freedom in the 20th century was *an heir* to Vallalar's political code. Only God is king. It was Gandhiji's wish that all the world should come under the sway of His Grace. Vallalar's slogan, "Let the cruel rule end quickly", was the same as that of Gandhiji's "Let the Whites quit (India)", which he raised in 1942. It was with the broad view that a good rule should be established throughout the world, that all should have a good life provided by the laws of equal justice that Gandhiji led the country's freedom struggle, as a rehearsal for such a rule.

"The followers of the Righteous Path, full of Grace, should rule the land" said Vallalar. Gandhiji described the same as *Ramrajya.*

Vivekanandha's Patriotism

Swami Vivekanandha, born during the time of Saint Ramalinga, was world-famous; he endeavoured, like the white-robed ascetic, to see a good rule throughout the world. Swami Vivekanandha struggled hard to fufil the Saint's declaration: "A moral brotherhood shoud be established in India."

"Warrior! Feel greatly honoured that you have been born an Indian."

"I am an Indian. Every Indian is my brother. The Indian who has a mature understanding is my brother. The Indian who is a prince. the Indian who is a pauper are also my brothers. The high-caste Brahmin and the low caste untouchable, if they are. Indians are my brothers. Declare this with pride." This is the gospel of the nation with which Swami Vivekanandha exhorts every Indian. Yes; Vallalar's moral brotherhood" is exemplified in his great gospel.

From Vallalar's utterances themselves we saw that his involvement in worldly life was considered by him an inevitable evil. When Swami Vivekanandha was involved in worldly life, owing to his love of the nation, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa also expressed the same views held by Vallalar:

"A thin veil of illusion has enveloped the mind of Vivekanandha God has done this for a certain good in his mind. But it is a very thin veil. Vivekanandha might tear it away at any moment". So said Paramahamsa. "Except for absolute ascetics, all the rest should have patriotism. If not, they are equal to corpses." This is the golden saying of Vivekanandha. As Paramahamsa was an absolute ascetic, he prescribed patriotism. Saint Ramalinga served living beings, with distant of no involvement in patriotism. Swami Vivekanandha also did the same. But when occasion demanded it, they were prepared to be absolute ascetics, renouncing patriotism. This the world knew.

The Utterance of the Sage of Wardha

Mahathma Gandhi, the man of grace and political leader, coming after these two great men, says as follows about his connexion with politics:

"As far as I am concerned, serving the nation was the means I have found out for attaining salvation. Only a ceaseless service to the nation, and through it, to the world, was the path of salvation I have found. To seek harmony with the living beings of the world is my avocation."

(*Raghupathy Raghav, p.*8.)

"The politics of saints is to seek a oneness with the living beings of the world, with a view to serving their welfare." This is the utterance of Gandhiji.

When an American journalist asked Gandhiji, "you are involved in politics. Won't the time come for you to leave it?" he replied as follows:

"Perhaps you do not know that I found it necessary to involve myself in politics, because I realized that without such involvement nothing much could be achieved. Political tasks should be undertaken with a view to social and spiritual betterment. When the rule of the people takes place, everything is politically oriented."

(*Harijan*, 13-10-'46)

Vallalar declares that politics should be entrusted to Righteous Path Seekers who are full of divine grace. Gandhij also declares that political affairs should be governed by a code of righteousness. In his autobiography, Gandhiji states:

"I do not agree with those who say that there is no connexion between politics and devotion to God, and that politics is one thing and devotion to God is another. I say this very humbly, but positively. To say that there is no connection between religious concern and politics is totally wrong. Only those who do not understand properly the idea of God would discriminate like that."

Bharati, the great visionary and grand soldier-warrior, who participated in India's freedom struggle says:

"A saint may not serve his own good, and it is not a customary view that he should fully renounce worldly virtues. The philosophy of elders is that they should on their own, ever endeavour, without considering the advantages, to dedicate the benefits of their endeavours, to God and to society which is an embodiment of God. If that is not so, why should great seers-turned-sages write scriptures? These sages, without being idle, taught wise ways for the good of the world. Is it fair to describe them as worldly men?"

(*Bharati's Treasure*)

The social service or the political tasks of saints, are based on the moral principle: "Toil hard, forego the benefits." Our saint also emphasised only that and lived accordingly.

Do Not Renounce Politics!

When all the followers of the righteous path stay away from politics, only the wicked path-seekers will hold sway in that field. There will be no peace on earth. It is natural that householders, involved in politics, are infatuated by power. That is, they would like to taste the fruits of their service to the people of a land. Such people might serve the welfare of the people. But they would not be the righteous-path-seekers, free from selfishness. The number of the righteous path seekers who would serve in the political realm, without expecting benefits, should increase.

Saint Ilango abdicated his throne. But he did not cease from political service. His epic deals with the history of the political revolution which established the good rule, eradicating the wicked one. Indeed, a seer who renounced worldly pleasures, outlined the great revolution a woman waged in the epic, *Silappadhikaram*.

The great Valluvar was an ascetic at heart. Even he, in the chapter on *Wealth* in the *Thirukural*, expatiates on politics, and curses that an immoral government should go.

Vallalar Forgotten!

If Saint Ramalinga who came in the tradition of Valluvar and Ilango had declared that "the politics of righteousness should flourish all over the world", could we think of him as one who is apart from the path of politics?

Gandhiji of our times fought for the freedom of our great nation and was victorious. But he did not wish to rule over free India, sitting on the seat of power. He was above political authority, even in free India.

Saints like Valluvar, Ilango, Vallalar and Gandhiji illustrate as to what extent spiritual seers should be involved in politics.

The contemporaries of Vallalar—the great seer, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Raja Ram Mohan Roy who endeavoured to reform Hindu society. Swami Vivekanandha, known as the Vedhanta Kesari—were said to have sown the seeds of revolution for the freedom of India. At the Centenary Celebrations of India's Freedom Struggle, apart

from the fathers of politics, the above mentioned prophets also were honoured by the Central Government. But historians had forgotten to include Vallalar in this Roll Call of Honour. Apart from the Central Government, the Government of Tamil Nadu also had not done its duty.

The code of politics as found by Vallalar was common to the whole, world and to all living beings. Because of that, perhaps, it did not attract the attention of those, with a narrow patriotic outlook.

Bharati says: "Vivekanandha and Paramahamsa laid the foundation for the freedom struggle." Even he had not introduced Vallalar as a political prophet who thought of social revolution as the foundation for political freedom.

Kings of the Righteous Path

Vallalar cited the example of Manu Needhi Chola to define the rule of the world of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood. He reminded us of how that great king granted justice even to a dumb creature like a cow. Great kings like Manu Needhi Chola who laid his son at the wheel of the chariot, in order to alleviate the distress of the cow which lost its calf, King Pari, the generous giver, who gifted his chariot to the supportless *Mullai* creepers, Pehan, who offered his costly shawl to the peacock to protect it from cold, were said to have ruled, following the path of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood. Vallalar was deeply saddened that they had no successors to this tradition.

To create heirs to their tradition, Saint Ramalinga wrote the story of the most exemplary of those kings namely, Manu Needhi Chola, so full of spiritual love and unity.

The great rule of the Universal Pure and Righteous Path that Vallalar dreamt of believed in the code of being just, even to "mean" creatures like ants and flies. That was why he held the story of Manu Needhi Chola who offered justice to the cow which lost its calf, as a model for the politics of righteousness. Indeed, Manu Needhi Chola was the only king who most completely fulfilled Vallalar's politics of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood.

Sibi - Pehan - Pari!

King Sibi who offered the flesh of his body to save the life of a pigeon was a righteous path follower. But the sacrifice he made was only a little piece of flesh from his body, nothing beyond that.

King Pehan who offered his shawl to the peacock shivering in the cold, was also a follower of the righteous path. But what he lost by his act of sacrifice was only a shawl, nothing beyond that.

Generous hearted Pari, who offered his chariot to the creeper without a support, was a king who too followed righteous ways. However, what he lost was only a chariot, and nothing beyond that.

The Perfect Follower of the Righteous Path!

What did Manu Needhi Chola, the most superior of all these followers of the righteous path, lose in his rendering justice to the calfless cow? Was that not his only son who was born to rule the world and who was fit to mount the throne after him? When all his kinsmen refused to kill him, he, forgetting his filial affections, and hardening his heart, drove the wheel of his chariot on his son and thus rendered justice to the calfless cow. Indeed, he was the perfect follower of the righteous path!

Even though the compassionate hearted might feel disturbed at heart by tbe account of the son being killed, what was the reason for Vallalar who was an embodiment of love, to write about that great king and praise him? Vallalar considered the act of Manu Needhi Chola, not so much for what he did, but as why he did it. Forgetting the cruelty of the act, he praised it for the principle.

We are living in the atomic age. We talk a lot about world peace. If the fear of the atomic bomb is to go, and world peace is to be established, the Code of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood is the only means for that. Those who talk of the unity of India, should redeem this as yet an aspect of the unity of the world. What we talk of today as internationalism is only the Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood which Vallalar visualized. Let those who are eager to establish India's unity, by putting an end to the fissiperous forces, follow the path of Vallalar.

Follow Vallalar

Vallalar is an excellent guide to those who wish for India's national integration, and to those who seek the unity of the working class of the world. If today's nationlists and internationalists are to see world-unity, as described by Vallalar, communal discriminations must have to be completely rooted out, and religious differences to be forgotten. There should be belief in God. It should also be borne in mind that He is one and that He pervades all lives. We should worship Him, through our service to living beings and thus we should achieve national and international unity.

XVII

THE DISCIPLINE OF COMPASSION TO LIVING BEINGS

The Tamils of ancient times were in the habit of eating meat. Though some Tamils had feelings of love through the showing of compassion to living beings, except Valluvar, no other poet in the Sangam Age wrote, condemning the habit of meat-eating. On the contrary, the songs of *Puranaanooru* do refer to the habits of eating mutton and fish.

The Path the Jains Showed!

There was a strong opposition to meat-eating, only after the religions of Jainism and Buddhism assumed importance in Tamil Nadu. We come to know that before this time, Brahmins also ate flesh. by sacrificing lambs at rituals of fire (*yaga*). In the Chapter, *Rejection of Meat*, Thiruvalluvar writes verses, rejecting and abhoring meat-eating. In the following *Kural*,

> "Not to kill and eat, truly
> Excels thousand pourings of ghee!"

he condemns ritual killings of animals and eating of meat by Brahmins. The credit of a strong condemnation of meat-eating, belongs solely to Vallalar, after Thiruvalluvar. In this respect, he outdoes the Jains and the Buddhists. He condemus the cruel habit of killing for meat-eating thus:

"Whenever cruel people started killing other lives,
I was struck with fear.
Wherever I witnessed the grief of other lives,
Alas, I too grieved.
My father! Thy holy heart knoweth
The trembling of my heart
Whenever I saw nets, hooks and snares."

Saint Thayumanava also sang:

"Oh Supreme Being!
Those who follow the vow of non-killing alone are the good.
I do not know what the rest are."

Yes. He declares that only those who have taken the vow not to kill, are the good people. Reluctant at heart to describe the rest as "bad people", he confesses he "does not know who they are!" Vallalar was so great a man as to embrace all living beings with love, and speak of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood, but owing to his abhorrance of meat-eating, he speaks "separation", He discriminates between vegetarians as "kindred", and non-vegetarians as "non-kindred."

"Those who kill lives and eat meat are not the kindred.
They are the non-kindred.
Oh, God Gracious, Thou commanded me,
Until they come into the fold of the Righteous Path
that gives delight,
Do alleviate their disgusting hunger.
But do not care to preach them good qualities.
And do not extend affection to them.
My Lord, Thou Supreme Dancer who playeth
amidst the Space.
Praised by true sages who have conquered illusions,
Deign to wear my garland of verses."

Though the meat-eaters are described as "non-kindred", he declares that the Supreme Being ordered him to" end their hunger also", out

of love for them. If the "non-kindred" would reach the righteous path of benevolence, leaving the habit of meat-eating, he will come forward to treat them also as "kindred".

Exhortations to the Man of Grace

Thiruvalluvar wished to eradicate meat-eating from human society itself. But he preached emphatically against meat-eating only to seers. It is Valluvar's utterance that the "power of grace is not given to meat eaters". It is evident from the following verses of Valluvar that he preaches about the necessity of non-meat-eating only to those who wished to seek a spiritual self-awareness:

"What graciousness can one command
Who feeds his flesh by flesh gourmand."

"All lives shall lift their palms to him
Who eats not flesh nor kills with whim."

Our Vallalar also greatly stressed upon non-meat-eating to those who belonged to his Order of the Universal and Righteous Path. Only they were divided into "kindred" and "non-kindred" by the Saint, not the common people. However, he requested all the people to leave the habit of meat-eating. We can know this from these lines:

"Seeing men who eat meat,
I was vexed, I trembled inside, I languished,
And my very bones ached, unable to bear it."

Opposition to Sacrifice of Living Beings

Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace also condemned the sacrifice of living beings to Gods. To kill lives in the name of Gods was a cruel habit that was prevalent among Tamils right from the Sangam Age. Even Valluvar who wrote of the killing of lives and of avoiding meat eating, did not condemn the habit of sacrificing living beings.

During the time of Vallalar, at the Kali temple in Calcutta, the capital of Bengal, countless number of lives were sacrificed. Even today, that habit is prevalent there. It is not known that the generous hearted Ramakrishna Paramahamsa ever condemned the habit of sacri-

ficing living beings at the Kali temple. The credit of the first ever open condemnation of the sacrifice of lives to Gods goes only to our Vallalar. In this respect our Saint shines as an heir to Lord Buddha.

During Vallalar's time also, there were petty deities known as *Kadan*, *Madan*, *Veeran*, *Kali*, *Maari* and *Kaatteri*. There was also a superstitious belief that these deities would cause diseases among the people. People prayed and sacrificed goats and cocks to these petty deities, with a view to preventing these diseases from occuring, or eradicating them after their incidence. An embodiment of love that Vallalar was, he was deeply disturbed by these cruelties, as shown by the following song:

" When I witnessed
Goats, pigs, cocks and the like,
Taken in their fulness,
Alas, to be sacrificed,
In the names of various petty deities
That are said to cause diseases,
I was pained at heart and I shivered.
When I saw the cruel abodes of these deities, personifying misery,
I trembled."

This reveals his abhorrence of animal sacrifice. Even though killing of lives was considered one of the heinous crimes, and comdemned by religionists during the two thousand years between Vallalar and Valluvar, animal sacrifice alone was not eschewed. There were also religionists who went about preaching that such a cruel habit was necessary to appease gods. In such circumstances, Vallalar fought single handedly against the sacrifice of living beings. One is at a loss to know as to how to praise his revolutionary outlook!

Who are the "Kindred"?

Of all the temples dedicated to Goddess Maariammañ, the ones for Goddess Kannaki, representing chastity, are the most famous. (An explanation about this may be found in *The Worship of Kannaki*)

The entire Tamil race is bound to be proud of this great Goddess of chastity. What a cruelty that she was depicted as a petty deity, causing disease to people!

Those who hate meat-eating consider it largely as a problem in, food habits only. A few others assume high-caste feelings just because they had given up meat-eating. Those who had stopped eating meat as a result of a proper understanding of the meaning of the Saint's principle of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood, are only so few. A mere giving up of meat-eating cannot make one become a pure-righteous-path-seeker. We do see many, who are not meat-eaters, behave wickedly towards men, treating them in many cruel ways. All these could not become "kindred", according to the view of Vallalar. Here is a description by the Saint himself as to who the "kindred" are, according to his expectation:

"Those with hatred for none,
And love for others as for themselves,
Rejoice from within, the fraternal unity.
Their hearts, I realised, are the abode
Where dances my Lord,
In the form of purest knowledge.
My mind longs intensely,
To serve those great seers."

This lyric defines the characteristics of the perfect seer, as adulated by Vallalar. Whether it is National Integration or Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood which Vallalar desired, we should wish for it deeply, without an idea of discrimination. We should consider all lives as belonging to us. Yes. Feelings of integration should be born at heart, and the lips should give expression to them. Who ever has the heart to follow these principles of righteous path, is alone the "kindred", as expected by Vallalar. Instead, to consider those who have given up meat-eating or those who are traditionally mere non-eaters of meat, as the "kindred" as defined by Vallalar, is ignorance.

Not a Problem of Food, but One of Unity

If Vallalar abhorred meat-eating, and insisted on vegetarianism, it was not because it was a problem in food habits. It was a problem

in the integration of the living kind. We should not forget that it was a sacred problem of the world of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood. Saint Ramalinga sings:

" Even if one is an ascetic,
Who can change a male into a female
And the female so created into a male within a moment
And who can revive the dead,
If he is one who has the desire
To eat the body of living beings without compassion,
Do not call him a sage.
I swear this on my Mentor, my Lord Shiva."

One may perform such miraculous deeds as changing a man into a woman, or reviving the dead. The Saint says that even he, if he is a killer of a life for the sake of meat eating, he can not be described a seer. The Order of the Universal Path which the Saint started, did not flourish well even during his time. The reason for this was his resolve to prevent meat-eaters from joining the Order.

Saint Ramalinga explains in detail the reasons for his rejection of meat in favour of vegetarian food, in his *Discipline of Compassion*. He was of the view that unless feelings of compassion to living beings arose, there was no possibility for the occurrence of unity among mankind, or for the birth of national integration in India.

Yes. Saint Ramalinga believed that the failure to realize the truth that living beings are symbols of the Infinite Spirit, is the cause for man exploiting another man, for the people of one nation enslaving those of another, for one community being suppressed, to let another community become powerful, and for the people of one religion hating those of another religion. He endeavoured therefore to foster spiritual love and unity, based on the discipline of compassion.

The Story of the Ball of Dust!

All people hold that "showing kindness to living beings" is 'compassion'. The disciples of Vallalar also thought so. One day Vallalar preached to them thus:

"Compassion does not stop with showing kindness to men and animals. It is more pervasive. Let me tell you a story for example."

"Two old men were walking along a street. One of them tripped over a ball of dust and it broke. On seeing this, the other man swooned. When he was revived, he was asked why he swooned. He replied that he swooned because the shapely ball of dust broke into pieces as his friend's leg tripped over it!"

Mending the Wicked

Ramalinga Vallalar preached that those who show kindness to living beings, should so conduct themselves as to be considerate even to the wicked. While mentioning the ways to bring the wicked to the good path, he preaches to his disciples as follows:

"However harshly inconsiderate a man is to me I shall 1. advise him with words of kindness, 2. threaten him, 3. entreat him, 4. bring him under control by giving him money, or 5. pray to God. Thus, I shall, by all means, bring him to the good path. You should also do likewise."

It was the belief of Saint Ramalinga that those who had taken to wicked ways could be mended by the followers of the Righteous Path.

XVIII

"I SPREAD MY WARES, BUT NONE WOULD BUY THEM !"

So far we correlated Saint Ramalinga's spiritual, political, economic, social, religious and linguistic ideas with his history and utterances.

Ramaining in Siddhivalagam, we shall from now on directly approach the Lord Buddha of the 19th century, preaching as he was to his disciples.

The Adhvaita State

The verses written in the manner of Saint Ramalinga conversing with God, and He with him, reveal that he had "divine revelation." Bharati said, "Realize that you are God." It means, man is capable of attaining divinity. Religious pundits describe this as the "*Adhvaita State*". Ramalinga Vallalar declared that the time had come for the Supreme Light Divine to suffuse him, to make him He, and He, him:

" Know ye the gracious Lord cometh this moment,
There is certainly no doubt about it.
I swear on the feet of the Lord.
For the True One—
The knowing One who overmastered me,

The Seer who shines at the Temple of Wisdom,
The All-Powerful, Pure One, the Sacred One,
The Supreme Light Divine,
The Universal Lord and Dancer,
The Nectar of Bliss—
For my Lord to stay here
Ye hasten to adorn marvellously
His holy temple on this earth
With gems, gold and flowers.

Hark ye people of the world
This is the hour for my Father,
the Unique and Supreme Lord, to come.
Know ye this is the truth.
Know ye that I state the divine word of truth
Feel no doubt about it and rejoice.
This day the Supreme Light Divine reaches us,
The days to come are joyful days.

My God, my Lord, the Master of My being,
Cometh today to be in my place.
Within the coming hour He will unite with my glorious body,
And remain within me inseparably.
This I know and state as a result of my great penance.
This is the truth and the only truth."

He sang thus, with feelings of proud fulfilment, in heightened bliss, and suffused with beatitude. Only those scholars who have realized the significance of Adhvaita would know the intrinsic truth of the utterances of Saint Ramalinga.

The Lord will Come!

The Seer of Vadaloor was not satisfied with his becoming one with God. He desired that every soul should attain the pleasures he had experienced. He said, therefore, that the Supreme Light Divine

that had suffused him was capable of suffusing all lives. If every one practised the discipline of compassion to living beings and stood by the principle of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood, and worshipped God, like Saint Ramalinga, then they would also be suffused with the Divine Light Supreme. The Saint taught this truth. A few among the people who did not realize this, and those who were not attached to the principle of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path refused to believe the utterance of the Saint that the time for directly seeing God had come. So, Saint Ramalinga sang:

" Alas! These people describe as my words,
The utterance, "Know ye that the Divine Light
cometh this moment."
Oh, Lord! Thou who suffused my heart
dancing in the sacred Hall!
They do not know that these are thine sacred words
Oh, what a reach of their mind!"

He also said that when God came, he would wake up all the dead up to that time, and make them join the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path. A publication regarding this, brought out by the Saint on 30-3-1871, under the title, "The Burial Edict issued to the Kindred of the House of Truth and Charity" states as follows:

"If any one died because of old age or disease, he should not be cremated but buried. In the full belief that those who are dead would wake up and seek to live again with us, we should, without weeping or sorrowing, devote ourselves to thought of the Lord of Chidambaram."

"If the husband died, let not the wife be deprived of her symbol of marriage (*Thali*). If the wife died, let not the husband attempt to marry again. If children died, let there be no grief. No final-rite-ceremonies need be performed, Announce the death to the people concerned, and on an appointed day, let those concerned be offered food. Do this thus in full belief."

"The time for my (Divine) Father, the Lord Almighty of Holy Chidambaram, to be pleased to appear in Parvathipuram, at the Hall of Truth and wisdom of the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path, is very near at hand. On that occasion, He

would revive all those of the *House* who are dead. This is truth and truth only.

"He would wake up even those cremated in ignorance of the publication of this letter. After the publication of this (letter) there should be no cremation. This is not proper for the Righteous Path."

"Have trust, you will attain great bliss. This is truth and only truth." (B.K. Pillai. V.11, pp. 105-6.)

Vallalar's Announcement

This announcement was made only for those who were affiliated to the House of Truth and Charity, as Members of the Order of the Universal Pure and Righteous Path. It becomes evident from the statement of Vallalar that the Supreme Light Divine would come, that he would revive the dead, and therefore the dead should not be burnt but buried, applies only to the Members of the Order of the Righteous Path, and not to the rest. If we bear this in mind, then we can understand the truth behind Vallalar's preachings.

Here is a part of a publication regarding the arrival of the Supreme Light Divine:

"Friends! I am overjoyed that I am conscious of the truth that from now on I have attained prodigious knowledge, rare qualities, instinctive awareness, wonderful powers of action, a new vision and experiences of a marvellous nature."

"I announce this solely because of my great desire welling up in me that my pure and righteous ideal of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood should be attained and enjoyed by you too."

"Hereafter, these lives, need not decay and destroy themselves. They shall imbibe such good qualities as true knowledge, true love, true compassion, etc,. and do good deeds. Following the pure and righteous path, which flourishes as a true and common code of all religions, they shall attain great solace and bliss. To enable them to live accordingly, the true God, as the Supreme Light Divine, has been divinely pleased to grant his vision and to say that from now on till a long period of indefinite duration to come. He would perform great miracles, at the Hall of Wisdom, so created for the exposition of the Pure and Righteous Path."

On the note, "according to this time indicated hereunder" in the last page of this publication, Thiru, Balakrishna Pillai stated in his work thus:

"In the original, written by someone else, and signed by Saint Ramalinga, there is no reference to "the time".

The Way of the Predecessors

There was nothing new in the Saint stating that God would appear before the Pure and Righteous Path seekers and that he would wake the dead up. Saint Thayumanava also sings;

"Ye see that the crows eat in company.
The flood of bliss of the boundless experience of God,
Overflows and is available in sole form and perfection.
Ye people of the world, come in company!
Let us drink it with delight ere this body falls."

He exhorts humanity to come and partake of the flood of the beatific joy of Lord Shiva, Manickavasaka the author of *Thiruvasakam*, also sings:

"Ye love all and attain salvation even in time.
Our Lord of the South and He who gulped poison,
Rarely accessible to Vishnu and Brahma and the heavenly beings,
Offers the wealth of His grace to his devotees,
Ye hasten to get it."

Vallalar stated only the same that both Thayumanava and Manickavasaka had said.

Saint Ramalinga had stated only in general terms that "God would come", but he did not mention any specific date.

Ignorance!

Oral tradition had it that a few people, without the ability to understand properly the purport of Vallalar's utterance, brought the dead-bodies of their relatives and laid them on the plains of

Vadaloor and waited in the hope that God would come and grant them their lives. When we consider the ignorance of those days, it is possible that such a thing could have happened. It was a fact that such people who believed that God would come to Siddhivalagam and appear before them in a vision and wake up the dead gathered in large numbers. It was also possible that people gathered in large numbers under the instigation of mischief-mongers whose intention was to embarrass Vallalar and make the people dislike him.

The Saint's Warning!

Pained by the ignorance of the people, Saint Ramalinga issued the following circular, under his signature, on 8—3—1873.

Hail to the Lord of Chidambaram!

An Announcement to the World

"Here is an announcement to people who are arriving now and who will be arriving later to offer worship at Siddhivalagam, adjacent to and connected with the Hall of Truth and Wisdom, in the North Chidambaram of Wisdom.

There is a rumour current that at the above place on the 5th of *Purattasi* (October), a miracle would take place. You, and those who belong to you, need not trouble yourselves and undergo any physical and financial hardship on hearing and believing that. The rumour is not true. The miracle may or may not take place, now or at any time. Therefore, attend with care, after this announcement, to whatever matters that are near to you!"

—Chidambaram Ramalingam Pillai

This is an announcement in the name of Saint Ramalinga released from Siddhivalagam, five months before 'disappearance'.

Saint Ramalinga was a greedy man! He said: "My love is vaster than the seven seas", and "I think beyond my capacity". He believed strongly that God would grant him whatever he asked for. It was in that belief he said that God would "come", so that people could see Him in a vision. He confirms this in a song thus:

"My habit it is to deem that I have received even before I receive.
Divine Giver Thou art, I assume
That Thou hast gladly granted me the light of grace.
Father! Thou wilt surely grant it,
For I shall not utter falsehood in the presence of my Mentor.
From now on I do not have any worry on this earth,
I have made my petition in Thy Holy Presence.
Show me grace.
All Hail to the Glory of Thy Divine Grace."

Here is an excellent instance of the Saint's determination to receive immortality from God, in the following song:

"I entreat Thee to give the nectar that flourishes in the realm of wisdom of heavens
Grant me grace this moment,
If Thou do not grant me grace,
I shall give up my life that requires this body,
And I shall put the blame on Thee,
Oh, Lord! Tell me do you want me or the blame?"

This song is comparable to the song of Saint Manickavasaka:

"If Thou do not grant me grace,
Who shall give succour to this humble self?
Oh, Rare One who overmastered me!
Oh, Dancer of the Golden Realm!
I suffer, separated from Thee and baffled at heart.
If Thou do not call me to Thee,
And show the gathering of the wise,
If I die, will not all laugh at it?"

Saint Ramalinga's steadfast devotion yielded him the glorious life without death. But, how could the common people who are not

the followers of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path, attain the glorious life without death? Though the Saint was aware of this truth, he declared that even they would attain the glorious life without death, with a view to converting their primitive existence into a human one!

The Dispute of the Disciples!

"Moral discipline" was one that had remained these thousand years a "commodity" to be supplied to others, and not a code of life which every one of the people should willingly follow. Only a few were an exception to this.

The socio-religious-reformistic principles of the Saint could not be observed even by those who were with him. He did not directly administer the House of Truth and Charity and the Hall of Truth and Wisdom. He had them run by his disciples. He was not pleased at heart with the conduct and discipline in those places.

Therefore he wrote regretfully from Siddhivalagam on 9-3-1872, to Thiru. Appaswamy Chettiar, belonging to the House of Truth and Charity, as follows:

"I am quite vexed with this *House*. This vexation will hit both ways. Therefore, all those who belong to the *House*, should agree to follow the Righteous Path, in silent obedience and self control. I declare I am blameless. Afterwards you have to suffer what comes."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 11, p. 107.)

The Hall Locked!

The secret warning did not yield the result. Therefore, he openly warned the followers in the House of Truth and Charity and in Siddhivalagam, by issuing an announcement on 25-11-1872. Apart from requesting again that there should be discipline, he warned that "those who fail to conduct themselves accordingly would be expelled." That also was futile. "Indiscipline" is a disease that had caught society. It was reflected by the disciples also. Vexed at heart, the Saint had the Hall of Truth and Wisdom locked and received the key from the priest. The Hall of Truth and Wisdom, which can be described as a Universal Temple, was established by his great efforts, even in the

face of stiff opposition from the Orthodox. When it was closed, we do not know what pangs his devoted heart suffered!

On the 5th of October 1873, our Saint had completed fifty years, and was stepping into the 51st year. The great man who aspired for the glorious life without death and who announced to the world that he had achieved it, desired, after living for 50 years, that he hould be away from the sight of the earthly people.

Defeatist Mentality?

What was the reason for the desire of the divine messenger who wished to establish a new world order by reforming all those who are seemingly good from outside, but who are wicked inside, to disappear before the fruition of what he desired? Is it a defeatist mentality? Or is it that he disliked this world and wished to attain the heavenly one? Perhaps not. The Saint's goal was only to attain immortality in this world. Also, he who wished to serve all lives, could not have so selfishly wished to renounce worldly life with a view to enjoying the Supreme Bliss. Was he cheated perhaps, without being granted the grace of God, and so he was fed up with this life? No. In the following song,

"I prayed the Lord to give me an immortal body,
Which can not be destroyed by air, earth, sky, fire, water and the rays of the sun,
Nor by death, disease and murderous weapons,
Nor by planets and their evil influences,
Nor by anything at anytime.
He hastened to give it to me.
Ye people of the world!
Do not deem it a disgrace to receive it.
Ye adhere to the Lord, my father, the Supreme Light Divine."

he makes the announcement of his having received an immortal body and he further states of how it was the temple for the Lord to reside.

"My God, my Lord, the Master of my being,
Cometh toay to be in my place.
Within the coming hour He will unite with my glorious body.

And remain within me inseparably.

This I know and state as a result of my great penance.

This is the truth and the only truth."

The divine devotee who sang of his having become one with God and thus attained the joy of immortality in this world, could not have been disappointed.

Was He Afraid of Opposition?

Was he later on baffled by the opposition and began disliking worldly life? When our Master passed his 50th year, he flourished triumphantly, crossing the obstacles his opponents had interposed against his progress? That the saint had not even the littlest fear in his mind about his opponents is evident from these songs:

"Miracle indeed!
Oh, it is the divine miracle of grace indeed!
The wicked were afraid of me,
And went away without saying a word.
They came again and stood at the threshhold seeking my refuge.
Those belonging to the Order of the Righteous Path alone succeeded.

Miracle indeed!
Oh, it is the divine miracle of grace indeed!
Those who scorned me from behind have come to nought.
They are not fit even to stand below the golden stairs,
They cry aloud regretting their unjust speech,
They now hail and praise me.

Miracle indeed!
Oh, it is the divine miracle of grace indeed!
All the world has joined the Righteous Path,
And praise it singing and reciting melodious songs.
All other paths of religion have ceased to exist.

Here is the Saint's matins to God, as the day dawns and the morning Sun appears in the new era, free from the differences of castes and creeds:

"The conch and the clarion sounded,
'Let all the world prosper in unity',
Elders gathered and spoke the glory
Of the renowned Universal, Pure and Righteous Path.
Oh, Lord Rare and Austere!
Thou who danceth performing miracles in the Space!
Oh, my Supreme Light Divine,
Who, giveth this life and the life to come!
Oh, my King! Awake from Thy slumber.
Silenced, the arrogant stand at my threshhold.
The Lord will break their silence.
Afflicted with disease, the haughty suffer,
And cry aloud, gathering before my door.
All the devoted sing the song of the Lord,
And dance extoling His glory.
Oh, Supreme Light Divine,
Oh, my Lord! Awake from Thy slumber,
Who kindly overmastered me!"

His songs confirm that it was not because of a defeatist mentality that he wished to disappear from the sight of the earthly people.

Words in Pain!

Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar declares that the Saint himself had stated the reason for his desire to disappear from this world. It is as follows:

"He was keenly interested in lecturing on the moral ideas found in Hindu scriptures, and in inculcation of ideas of universal brotherhood, mercy, compassion, etc. in the minds of people. However, only a very few respected and followed the lofty moral codes he gave. Saddened about this in the end days, he often remarked:"

"You are not fit to be members of this Order which observes Universal Brotherhood. The true members of this Order live in the far north of India."

"You do not heed to me, nor do you conduct yourselves according to my advice. Perhaps, you are determined not to listen to me. However, the time is fast approaching for scholars from Russia and America and other lands to come to India to preach the same Universal Brotherhood."

"What I now uselessly utter as great truths, you will then be able to respect and act accordingly. You will soon see that Brothers of Wisdom, living in the far North will perform many miracles in India and bring about immense good."

Decision to Disappear!

We know that Thozhuvoor Mudaliar was the principal disciple of Saint Ramalinga. Therefore we have to believe his account about the Saint's disappearance. From his account, we are well aware that the Saint firmly believed that his goals would be fulfilled one day and that triumphant and great day would come very soon, and that he had absolutely no defeatist feelings. The following verses of Vallalar,

"The Righteous Path alone flourished,
Other paths declined
All the world united at my call,
With my Lord's grace of kindness to living beings."

indicate his triumphant feelings. But he considered that the Tamil Land was not fit to be a leader to present to the world his socio-religious ideas of reform. Yes. Living for fifty years, right from his day of awareness, he toiled to find a world-unity. From his experience he understood the weakness of the Tamil Land and the Tamil Race. Therefore, he planned to disappear from being seen by the people of the world.

The Same Fate for Gandhiji!

Gandhiji also was in the same state of mind in the last days of his life.

"It appears as though I have no place in India the way it is shaping now. I have given up the thought of living for 125 years. I may live for another year or two."

(*Harijan*, 15.6.47)

Gandhiji was depressed because of the way he was treated by those near him. Yes. He approached death at a time when he had lost faith in his companions.

Vallalar was also not deceived by the man in the street. He was pained that those near him who did not conduct themselves according to his ideals. Whatever be that reason, the Saint had decided to disappear from the sight of the earthly born.

Mortification of the Body!

Even three months before his disappearance, he began preparing his body for it. Here is a report from a book:

"He ate only once for a few days. Later, even while eating once, he gradually reduced the quantum of food and finally fully stopped eating. He lived on greens and water. Stopping these, he drank honey and he caused his body to grow weak."

(*Niyaaya Vachira Kudaarum*, p.172.)

Saint Ramalinga tried to prepare his disciples also for parting from him, by preaching frequently to them. About that there is the following account:

"When he reached his 51st year, he declared that he was leaving the world and prepared the mind of his disciples to be reconciled to the idea. He revealed his wish that he wanted to attain *Samadhi*. In 1873, for six months, he preached grandly about Universal Brotherhood."

"Then, at the end of the year, he stopped preaching and remained silent for three months."

In 1874, he began speaking at the end of January, and warned of the events that would take place.

(The Five Canons of *Thiruarutpa*, published by the Order of the Righteous Path, Madras, p.4.)

The Final Sermon!

It became customary for the Saint to shut himself up for a few days and later to come out for a few days, from his Abode of Divine Bliss (*Siddhivalagam*) and to preach whenever he came out, and thus he spent many months.

One day, he placed the lamp that was inside Siddhivalagam, outside the abode, and was pleased to say:

"Worship this lamp always. I am going to shut this door. Hereafter, for some time, all of you, without wasting your time, offer your pious rituals to this lamp, according to the song which begins, "Thinking constantly, feeling intensely", as God flourishes in this flame. For the present I am in this body. Hereafter I shall enter all bodies."

The song that Saint Ramalinga referred to is as follows:

"Thinking constantly, feeling intensely,
Melting in devotion and full of love,
The body drenched in welling tears,
I supplicate the Lord, ever extoling Him,
Oh, Nectar of Grace, Treasure of Goodness,
Cosmic Dancer, my very own Lord!
Come ye people of the world!
Ye shall live a life sans death
Invent I do not,
Lie I do not,
I state but the truth,
This is the time to attain bliss and beatitude."

Once these "rituals" were over, he preached one day to those who were gathered round him, as follows:

"Brotheren of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood!

"According to the command of the Lord of the Supreme Light Divine, I spread my wares, none would want them. I have wound up. Therefore, for another hour you will not be able to see me physically. Deeming this lamp as divine, prosper by following the path of compasssion to all lives. Then the Lord of the Supreme Light Grace will come. He will perform many wonderful miracles. There will be his golden rule of divine grace. He will grant the gift of a life without death to the 'kindreds', and to the rest, a state of maturity for the liberation of the Soul."

Prophetic Utterance

Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar had collected and offered to society the important sayings of the Saint, which he uttered o his disciples before his disappearance. They are as follows:

1. Even though Hindus did not heed to my preachings, greats souls would reveal the secret thoughts inbedded in scriptures, and canons to foreigners and they would gladly receive them.

2. The evil influence of the present spirit will subside within ten years.

3. In due course, the habit of eating meat will disappear.

4. Discriminations of caste and traditional creeds will gradually disappear, and a "moral brotherhood" will be established in India, on an acceptance of the principle of a world-brotherhood.

5. In reality, universal love is God. It creates and establishes perfect peace and fraternity amidst all in the world.

6. Once men become aware of the divine powers hidden in each one of them, they will attain miraculous powers of transforming natural energies.

Thus, the sacred mouth that sang of a new order of world unity, offered its last sermon. Then he consoled his tearful disciples and blessed them. He told them; "I am going to be inside for ten or fifteen days. Do not attempt to seek me and get disillusioned. If you attempt to see me, none of you will see me. God will make the abode appear empty. He will not betray me."

The Lord will Protect!

Stating that the Government, on seeing the sacred doors closed, would order their opening, and after that God would grant grace, he entered a room in Siddhivalagam. The doors were latched. The midnight of Friday the 30th of January, 1874, was made sacred by the Saint's body becoming one with the Spirit.

The Saint who appeared as the result of the penance done of yore by the Tamil Race, physically disappeared, without the support of the Tamils of his day and without completing the sacred task of establishing spiritual love and unity.

I Shall Come Again!

Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar who was with Saint Ramalinga when he disappeared, declares that he stated that he would come again and until that time, apart from India, he would strive for the progress of the world in Europe and America. "When he disappeared, he only stated he would come again, but did not mention anything about the time and the occasion," says Mudaliar.

The following song is believed to be the last one of Saint Ramalinga;

> Ignorant that I was, I babbled, praised by the mad world.
> Thou wert pleased to grant all my desires,
> I am relieved of my fears and I drink the Nectar of Grace.
> Oh, I experience the sleep of bliss each day!

XIX

AFTER THE DISAPPEARANCE

Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace, who sang thus,

"I should voice the glory of Thy Grace, my Father
Going all over the world and the heavens,"

physically disappeared from being seen by the people of the earth, in order to accomplish that task. His principal disciple announced that the Saint who said he would appear in India, and in Tamil Nadu which is part of India, "Would strive for world-progress in Europe and America!" Accordingly, the belief that our Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace becoming one among the seers, does live amidst us even today, and that he would appear amongst the devotees, is current even now among us.

The State of Siddhivalagam

After the disappearance of the Saint, his band of disciples did not gather together to continue the tasks he had left incomplete. We saw that after the death of Gandhiji, the *Wardha Ashram's* well-built organization collapsed and the disciples who were engaged in constructive work went in many directions. If this was the fate of the *Ashram* of Gandhiji, which had all the means and materials, it is not surprising that the *Ashram* at Siddhivalagam, with inadequate means and materials a century ago, should have deteriorated.

We had known earlier that the Temple of Universal Religion,

known as the Hall of Truth and Wisdom, which the Saint established at "North Chidambaram of Wisdom", after a great deal of effort, was closed by the Saint himself, when he disappeared. As he sang,

> "I devined the Temple of Truth and Wisdom from within,
> I attained the power of the Righteous Path."

his body became, as far as he is concerned, the Hall of Truth and Wisdom. He did not require another Hall of Truth and Wisdom outside it. That was why, without going over to the Hall of Truth, and Wisdom for the conduct of worship, he stayed at Siddhivalagam itself. He made it his habit to come to the Hall of Truth and Wisdom in Vadaloor only during the *Ahai Poosum* celebrations, in order to make the people happy.

Now, apart from locking the Hall of Truth and Wisdom where hangs a picture, he hid his golden body, which flourished, as the Walking Hall of Truth and Wisdom, from being seen by the people of the world!"

The Order Defunct

After the Saint's disappearance, the Order of the Universal Pure and Righteous Path, founded by him also became inactive. It almost became defunct, we may say. It is a fact known to the world that Gandhiji also wished to disband the Congress organization, fostered by him, even during his life time. But as it is not a spiritual establishment, but a political and social organization, functioning in the field of worldly affairs, it continues to exist, even after Gandhiji, on the support of political power.

Saint Ramalinga declared that Lord Nataraja was the Head of the Order of the Righteous Path. Yes. As long as the Saint of the Light of Divine Grace was guiding the Order, it was fitting that the Lord of Chidambaram was its Head. After the Saint's disappearance the divine characteristics of the Order began to wane and so it was natural that it also became defunct. We can not deem that as the failure of the Saint, but only as the divine play of one who became Godly.

Did not Vallalar, the symbol of love, start at Vadaloor the House of Truth and Charity, toquench the hunger of the hungry?

That alone continues to exist even now, despite the disappearance of the Saint. The oven that he lighted at the House, still continues to burn. Until poverty and hunger are completely rooted out and all acquire even wealth, the fire that the Saint lit in the oven would not be quenched. It shall not also be quenched. The task of those who continue to see that the oven burns without being put out, should win the approbation of the world's people.

An Enquiry by the Collector

"Is it possible for any human being to physically disappear?" "Is it not certain that," "all those who are born must die" as elders say. This is the thought that naturally occurs to anyone. Because of this there might have been those who doubted whether it was true that the Saint disappeared in body.

The Government also doubted the Saint's disappearance. Also, it became the duty of the Government to scotch the rumours, set afloat by doubters. Therefore Mr. J.H. Garstin, the then Collector of South Arcot went to Mettukkuppam, and conducted an enquiry. The *First Five Canons of Thiruarutpa*, published by the Order of the Righteous Path, stated thus:

"A few days after Vallalar had locked himself in, under orders from the Government, the Collector, a doctor and the Tahsildar came to Mettukkuppam. Of these, the Collector and the doctor were silent. But Thasildar Venkataraman derided the admirers who were there, in an authoritarian manner, and loudly threatend them to open the door; if not, a fine would be imposed on them. But the two Englishmen went round Siddhivalagam twice or thrice, and with the noble thought that nothing ill should be said of great man, called the followers and asked them what they were doing. They replied, "Sir, we feeding the poor as advised by the Saint, and worshipping God." On hearing that they felt happy and departed, donating towenty rupees towards expenses for feeding that day."

The Collector's Note

Details about Parvathipuram (another name for Vadaloor) where Saint Ramalinga flourished famously are furnished on pages 316, 317 of the *Manual of South Arcot*, written by the Collector of South Arcot, Mr. J.H. Garstin, and published in 1878, on behalf of the Madras

Government. It looks like a poetic presentation by the Collector on the Saint. It is given here as it is:

"Parvathipuram: A hamlet containing 1,189 people. It is on the Vridhachalam Road, at the 23rd mile, South-West of Cuddalore. It is a sacred seat where lived Ramalinga Paradesi. To the amazement of everyone, he stood as an epitome of the seers of the present time. He was considered by his disciples almost a God. Ramalinga was born in 1823, in the Chidambaram Taluk, in a Vellala (agriculturist) family. Even at a young age, he had the capacity to compose verses. He became known by his own devotional songs. Some verses were in the manner of ancient religious heads. Many were in praise of the Gods at temples situated in sacred seats like Thiruthanikai in North Aroct, and Thiruvotriyoor, near Madras. Others spoke of the excellence of a great spiritual life. The songs, last alluded to, were responsible for extolling him as a spiritual guide and teacher. After making pilgrimage to the famous seats of worship in the South, he settled in a village called Karunguzhi, near Parvathipuram. He was then at the peak of his fame. It is said he shifted his residence to Vadaloor, with a view to keeping his admirers and disciples by his side. Many among there were middle-class-officers.

In 1872, he finished the construction of a round roofed, eight cornered hall, from the money donated by the public. It is said that he chose this place because, he could see the four towers of the Chidambaram Nataraja temple. It was not an ordinary temple. The worship there was extraordinary. Ramalinga Paradesi preached to his disciples that it was possible for them to revive themselves to life from death. He therefore stressed that it was desirable to bury the bodies of the dead, instead of cremating them. It is known that even many Brahmins, believing this, buried the bodies of their dead relatives. The bodies of the dead from many neighbouring hamlets were brought to Vadaloor for burial there.

In 1874, he went into a room in Mettukkuppam (a small hamlet adjacent to Karunguzhi), and had it latched from outside. (Even now, the room is like that.) It was his habit to use the room for deep meditation. He commanded his disciples not to open the room for some days. From then on he disappeared. The room still remains locked. Those devoted to him still believe that he had become one

with God. They also believe that when the appropriate time comes, he will return.

Whatever may be thought of him as a religious leader, as far as his verses are concerned, they are of a high quality. This has been admitted by competent elders. His story is an indication of the directions which religious fervour may still take."

The Collector had not repudiated the disappearance of the Saint. It is worthwhile noting that he did not also conjecture that he could have died naturally. Besides, the Collector did not attempt to open the room in which the Saint disappeared, by entering it. His statement, "the foom still remains locked" indicates this.

XX

POLEMICS ON ARUTPA RESUMED !

The orthodox Saivites felt immensely relieved that the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path became inactive owing to the disappearance of the Saint, and that the Hall of Truth and Wisdom was closed by the Saint, by his disappearanoe. They failed to realize the loss to the religious world by the departure of a man of divine grace because of their animus. But their "happiness" did not last long. The Righteous Path Seekers, split and paralyzed by the Saint's disappearance, reunited five years later and became active.

A few years after Vallalar's disappearance, the Hall of Truth and Wisdom was opened again and the worship, as laid down by the Saint, began.

The fifth and sixth canons (of *Arutpa*) which remained without being printed, saw the light of day as books. In addition, the *Songs of Divine Grace* were recited with greater force and devotion in the temples of Tamil Nadu, at prayers, at the homes of individuals and at common places.

The Hall of Truth and Wisdom in Vadaloor, and Siddhivalagam in Mettukkuppam, became pilgrim centres for people devoted to divine worship. Apart from Hindus, those belonging to other religions also began to think of the Saint's reformistic ideas. Particularly, genuine Saivites uttered the slogan:

"Hail! Supreme Light Divine!
Hail Infinite Love Divine!"

The Saint's call, "All religions are agreeable" began to echo even in the Saivite strongholds.

The orthodox Saivites were agitated over the renaissance of Vallalar's Righteous Path Movement. Thus, in 1897, the polemics over the *Arutpa* assumed a new life. If Jaffna Arumuga Navalar led the opposition to Arutpa, during the time of Vallalar, Jaffna K. Kathirvel Pillai led the opposition now. He was of a Saiva Vellala stock, born at Melaippoveli, in Jaffna. He had a sound scholarship both in Tamil and Sanskrit. He was deeply aware of Saivite scriptures and canons. He served as a teacher of Tamil at the Wesley College in Madras. His mentor, Somasundara Nayagar, worshipped Vallalar as his *guru*, while his disciple conducted himself as an enemy to Vallalar.

As the sixth canon had been published, after the death of the Saint, the orthodox were angered by the revolutionary ideas found in it. The orthodox Saivites feared that if Vallalar's *Songs of Divine Grace* spread among people, the Saivite religion itself would be *destroyed*. As usual, one or two Saivite monasteries aided them secretly. Except for a few scholars in Saivite scriptures and canons, the common people did not support the orthodox Saivites.

In the task of preaching in support of Vallalar's *Arutpa*, Vadivelu Chettiar, Maraimalai Adigal, Kalyasundara Mudaliar, Thambi Pavalar stood in the forefront. The common people also lent support. Forward looking young men passionately supported the *Arutpa* camp.

As it was not a time of political parties and agitations, the quarrel between the supporters, and opponents of *Arutpa* assumed the proportions of a political struggle.

Blind Orthodoxy

The orthodox Saivites, without understanding the changing times, talked "tradition". They did not like the Saint's code, "All religions are agreeable." The poor, owing to the impact of alien religions like Islam and Christianity, and by the logical arguments of the Christian Fathers particularly, and by the service rendered by the

Fathers to Hindus who were depressed and oppressed, were leaving the fold of Saivite religion. Many among the educated also, losing faith in "tradition", were transforming themselves into atheists. The orthodox did not shake even their little finger to protect their Saivism from this deterioration. Vallalar's reformistic preachings served as an indirect service to prevent religious conversions and the growth of atheism. The fanatic Saivites, in their blindness and narrow-mindedenss, did not notice this. Therefore, they argued that "the songs of Ramalingam Pillai and his immoral codes were contrary to the orthodox Saiva Siddhanta" and that the songs he sang arose because of ignorance, and so, they were not songs of divine revelations, but of ignorancc."

On the 4th of October, 1903, a big conference at the Hall of Saiva Siddhanta was convened, on behalf of the Supporters of the opponents of *Arutpa*. It was called "The conference of scholars for condemning the false *Arutpa*."

Under the Chairmanship of Thanikachala Mudaliar, N. Kathirve Pillai spoke:

"The Songs of Ramalingam Pillai can not be songs of divine grace. To call him "Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace," is an extreme sacrilege to Shiva. The twelve canons, beginning from Saint Gnanasambandha's *Thevaram* and ending with the *Periyapuranam* of Saint Sekkizhar, alone, are songs of divine grace." Thus, separate conferneces were convened by either side, to carry on debates, and all those who participated in them were great Tamil scholars.

It is desirable to examine the differences of opinion of the followers of Saiva Siddhanta, with Vallalar.

During the time of Saint Ramalinga, there were differences of opinion even between the Siddhantists anb Vedhantists. Saiva Siddhantist by birth as the Saint was, he sang that "Vedhanta and Siddhantal should flourish in unity" and desired to find a harmony between these philosophies. This was not liked by the orthodox Saivites. Citing six philosophies- *Yoganta, Kalanta, Bhodhanta, Nadhanta, Vedhanta* and *Siddhanta*- he names them together as *Shadanta*. Declaring that the last two philosophies enclosed the first four, he said that the two philosophies-Vehadnta and Siddhanta—have become one with the (Philosophy of) Universal, Pure and Righteous Path.

"What is *Shadanta* in the *Shadanta* Philosophy of Universal Pure and Righteous Path? The awareness of the six-dimensioned philosophy of *Vedhanta*, *Siddhanta*, *Bhodhanta*, *Nadhanta*, *Yoganta* and *Kalanta* varies according to differences of time and place. Therefore, *Shadanta* does not pervade, as the other four do in *Siddhanta* and *Vedhanta*. The four philosophies, as above, are contained as follows: The *Bodhanta* and *Yogantv* philosophies are found in *Vedhanta*, and *Siddhanta* contains *Nadhanta* and *Kalanta* philosophies. Only this unity of *Vedhanta* and *Siddhanta* is now available in experience, as pure *Vedhanta* and pure *Siddhanta*."

"These pure philosophies of *Vedhanta* and *Siddhanta* are the attributes of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path which is the only ever-lasting path."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 4, p.45.)

This is Saint Ramalinga's six-dimensioned universal sermon.

Orthodox Saivites called Vallalar's universal awareness "anarchy", and named him an "anarchist"!

Saiva Siddhantists generally accept the principles of *Adhvaitha*. But they divided it into pure *Adhvaitha* and absolute *Adhvaitha* and accepted only pure *Adhvaitha*. But Vallalar accepted both. This is as a result of his universal faith. The orthodox Saivites disliked this.

The following verses reveal Vallalar's receptivity to the philosophies of *Vedhanta* and *Siddhanta*, and the precepts of pure *Adhvaitha* and absolute *Adhvaitha*:

"Thou art the state of Vedanta and the Truth of Siddhanta,
Thou art the Universal Wisdom and the Realm of Vedanta,
Thou art the Centre of all philosophies and Thou art beyond the Nine States,
Thou art the source of the myriad worlds and the bliss of the supermind.

Oh, Great Lord!
Thou shine forever amidst the space of silence,
Transcending the codes of disputed creeds.

Thou art the truths of Duality in Monism,
Qualified Monism, Absolute Monism,
Pure Monism and Universal Monism.
Thou art without any other basis but the Self.
Thou art the Eternal Existence and the Consciousness beyond comparison.

Oh, Great Lord!
Thou art the Mother who giveth all
Thou art the Father, the Mentor and the Divine."

In these verses Saint Ramalinga dwells on how God is an embodiment of all philosophies. The scholars of Saivite scriptures and canons deemed only the polemics of Saivite fanaticism as Saivism and opposed universalism which was contrary to it. Therefore they were antagonistic to Vallalar, the preacher of universalism.

Vallalar who wished to seek a unity in the philosophies of internal religions, did not hesitate to condemn spurious philosophies. Those philosophers who speak of the philosophy of 'illusion' believe, "I am the Soul". Though Vallalar did not refute it as a principle, he condemned those who speak philosophy without divine sanction. Here is a song from the *Arutpa*, as an instance:

"Oh, Lord of the famed Kandha Shrine at harmonious Chennai!

Oh, Lord Gracious and Serene! Indwelling Gem!
Oh, Shanmuga! Lord Supreme!
Thou art the embodiment of goodness,
The Infinite and Perfect Quiescence,
Thou art the Enlightened and Supreme Being,
Those who think of themselves as Supreme,
Waste their days declaring
That none but themselves are the supreme.
That there is neither good nor bad,
And that they follow the middle way,

Between worship from within and without.
They persist in preaching divine justice,
But they will not give up their wicked ways.
When facing the consequences of past deeds,
They will give up their spiritual philosophy.
The knowledge of these mortal beings in considering themselves supreme,
Is like the knowledge that names a rope a serpent."

(*Deivamani Malai*)

There are those who opine that these verses condemn as a principle the very philosophy of illusion. The orthodox Saivites, interpreting thus, asked those who declare that "all religions are agreeable to them", to censure only these philosophers of illusion, disliked by them.

If what they interpreted is correct, then this song should be held contrary to the principle of universalism which considers "all religions as agreeable", because this song was composed by Saint Ramalinga during his childhood days.

XXI

TRIUMPH FOR ARUTPA ADHERENTS

The second round of debate between the *Arutpa* adherents and the opponents was quite fierce. Great scholars, pundits of scriptures and canons, heads of Saivite monasteries were connected with the debate one way or the other. Many organizations, established to work for the welfare of Saivism, split up into factions to participate in the polemics. Both sides released condemnatory notices and publications. A large gathering of impressionable young men rallied round the *Arutpa* adherents. Therefore, the opponents of *Arutpa* had to face many difficulties. At a few meetings stones were thrown at Kathirvel Pillai. An effigy of his likeness was burnt. Works like the *Autobiography of Thiru Vi. Ka.*, and the *Biography of Maraimalai Adigal* note that some who were very angry with Kathirvel Pillai even attempted to kill him. Maraimalai Adigal who was the leader of the *Arutpa* adherents endeavoured to prevent his camp from indulging in activities opposed to the code of love taught by Vallalar, and succeeded occasionally.

Maraimalai Adigal's Service

Maraimalai Adigal toured the length and breadth of Tamil Nadu, successfully argued against the orthodox stand of the opponents of *Arutpa*, and spread the fame of *Arutpa*. There is a detailed account about this in the *Biography of Maraimalai Adigal*, written by his son, Marai. Thirunavukkarasu, and published by the *Saiva Siddhanta Society*. Maraimalai Adigal was deeply devoted to the Saivite religion, and had

acquired excellent knowledge of three languages - Tamil, Sanskrit and English. He was feared by the opponents of *Arutpa* because he was the leader of the *Arutpa* adherents. Therefore, they made him the target of their opposition.

The *Thiruarutpa* is a gospel of universal religion which seeks amity among all religions. Therefore, Nanjil Thambi Pavalar became an adherent of *Arutpa* and spread the fame of Vallalar. He refuted the orthodox arguments of Kathirvel Pillai on a number of platforms and earned a name as an astute opponent of Kathirvel Pillai. A great triumph for Vallalar's universal religious faith was a Muslim's encomium on the *Arutpa*. Among the common people who supported the adherents of *Arutpa*, there were many representing various religions.

Poovai Kalyanasundaram

Next in importance to Maraimalai Adigal, was Poovai Kalyanasundara Mudaliar, one of the *Arutpa* adherents. This great man had boundless love for Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace, and so considered it his life's aim to sing the praise of Vallalar.

Thiru Vi. Kalyanasundaram mentions as follows in his autobiography about this great personality:

"Poovai Kalyanasundara Mudaliar is a great Saivite scholar, a lion of Siddhanta philosophy. His mien and appearance suit his name. He has a crystal clear mind, absolutely blotless. He lived as a Saivite saint.

Many studied with him. He was easily accessible. In his days, it was rare to see a book without his eulogy. His commentaries on Saint Thayumanava bear testimony to his Siddhanta scholarship.

I did not move with him closely during the time of Kathirvel Pillai. Only later on, I moved with him closely."

He supported the adherents of *Arutpa* because of his devotion to Vallalar's socio-religious reforms. He disliked particularly the superior-inferior feelings of casts.

Why did Opposition to *Arutpa* Arise?

If we read the publications of the opponents of the *Arutpa*, we can know about the high-caste complexes of those scholars who were

in the forefront. Their high-caste complexes which had seeped into their blood were alone responsible for their animus towards Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace. It seemed to be the accepted faith that if the leadership of the Hindu religion was to be held only by the Brahmins, then the leadership of the Saivite religion belonged solely to the Vellalas. The reaction of the opponents of *Arutpa* stemmed only from the conclusion that Saivite preceptors could hail only from among the Saivite Vellalas. This was the communal fanaticism of the day! Why? Even now, all Saitive monasteries continue to remain the refuge of those of a particular caste. Those from other communities however much saintly they are, as a result of their learning the scriptures and canons, could not become the heads of Saivite monasteries. Poovai Kalyanasundara Mudaliar disliked this attitude. Let us listen to Poovai Mudaliar who had attained such Siddhanta scholarship and proficiency and such a life appropriate to a Saivite seer, as had been extolled by our Tamil savant (Thiru Vi. Ka), on his experiences in a Saivite monastery:

"I am quite knowledgeable on the monasteries in the South, at which I had delivered my discourses. I requested a well-known monastic head to grant me ascetichood by the wearing of saffron robes. He refused. I responded sharply, 'Will the doors of Heaven (Kailash) open only to the Saivite Vellalas of the South and not to the rest?' Communal monasteries are detrimental to Saivism. Saivism will not flourish unless these citadels of castes are broken."

(*Autobiography of Thiru Vi.Ka*, pp. 659-60.)

Thus we come to know that the acrimony between the adherents to and the opponents of *Arutpa* was a struggle between those who wished to put an end to the high and low caste complexes, and those who tried to perpetuate such differences. It may be borne in mind that it was also with a view to completely eradicating the high and low caste complexes that Maraimalai Adigal supported the adherents to *Arutpa*.

Maraimalai Adigal had strongly condemned the high caste complexes found among the Saivite Vellalas, in his book called *Caste Discriminations and False Saivism.*

The monastic head's refusal to offer saffron robes to Poovai Mudaliar was not a problem connected with the right to enter Heaven

(Kailash) as he thought, but one in which only a particular caste had the right to hold the seat of the headship, and not those of other castes. If society commonly shared the properties of the Saivite monasteries, the communal distinctions would go; true Saivism would flourish and grow.

They Went to the Court!

The adherents to *Arutpa* and those opposed to it filed defamation suits against each other and went to court. It this regard, Saint Ramalinga's nephew, Sabapathy, filed a suit against N. Kathirvel Pillai, at the George Town Police Court. The judgement was in favour of Kathirvel Pillai.

Kandaswamy Kavirayar, a supporter of the opponents to *Arutpa* filed a defamation suit against Swamy Vedhachalam. Later, as they came to a settlement, the case was taken back.

In both these cases, Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Aiyar was called in as a witness, on behalf of the opponents of *Arutpa*. He was a witness in the first case. Thiru Vi. Ka. says that it was because of Dr. Aiyar's testifying that Kathirvel Pillai won. In the second case, he succeeded in his efforts to bring about an agreement between the plaintiff and the defendant.

Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Aiyar was the disciple of the great scholar, Meenakshisundaram Pillai, attached to the Thiruvavaduthurai Monastery. In the beginning, he was not so much interested in Saint Ramalinga's *Songs of Divine Grace*,(*Arutpa*). But later on, he was drawn both to Vallalar and to the *Songs*.

In the case filed by Thiru. Sabapathy, at the Court in George Town, one of the witnesses who did not testify in favour of Kathirvel Pillai was Thiru Vi. Kalyanasundaram. Thiru Vi. Ka. says that as he had to testify at a court on the day he was to write his Intermediate Examination, he had to put a stop to his higher education.

Kathirvel Pillai, the author of the *Opposition to Arutpa* died at Connoor in the Nilgiris, on 26-3-1907. With his death, the opposition to *Arutpa* also disappeared.

Thiru Vi. Ka. too?

Thiru Vi. Kalayanasundaram, was one who right from his younger days, disliked communal discrimination among Tamils - parti-

cularly among the Saivites. When once a Jaffna scholar said that "Saivism observes distinctions of castes", he strongly opposed it by saying, "If it is determined that Saivism approves of a mean caste, Is shall relinquish Saivism and leave it."

(Thiru Vi.Ka's *Autobiography*, p.659.)

Even he, joining hands with the opponents of *Arutpa*, carried on a propaganda against the excellence of *Arutpa*. In several places in his autobiography; he himself had mentioned this openly and frankly.

Thiru Vi.Ka. was a student of Thiru. Kathirvel Pillai. At the time of the controversy between the supporters and opponents of *Arutpa*, he was a student at school. Because of his devotion to his teacher whose oratorical powers attracted him as a youth, he associated himself with the opponents of *Arutpa*. After the death of Kathirvel Pillai, he understood the greatness of the *Songs of Divine Grace*, (*Arutpa*), and became a Righteous Path Seeker. He endeavoured all his life to spread the fame of Vallalar.

Except for the names of these two great scholars from Jaffna - Arumuga Navalar and Kathirvel Pillai - time had obliterated the names of others who showed opposition to the *Arutpa*, during either of their times. But Thiru Vi. Ka's fame flourished, outlasting time. His works — *The Holy Mind of Saint Ramalinga* and *The Universal Flame*—are his dedications to the altar of Ramalinga Vallalar.

The Theosophical Society

Thus, the opposition to *Arutpa*, which arose a generation after Vallalar, totally disappeared, without a possibility for revival. The truth that Saint Ramalinga's songs were sung (by him) as the result of divine grace, was established. To put it in a different way, the high-caste complexes were put an end to, and the flag of universalism was flying high. The controversies between the supporters and opponents of *Arutpa*, which were revived in 1897, after the disappearance of Vallalar, went on till 1907.

The divine voice of Vallalar, after his disappearance rang, in all the eight directions. Madam Blavatsky, the organisational President of the Theosophical Society wrote, extolling Vallalar. It is desirable that something is said about the Theosophical Society.

The Theosophical Society was established in 1875, in the city of New York, during the time of Vallalar. The credit of starting this Society goes to Madam Blavatsky of Russia and Col. H.S. Alcott of the United States. These two great persons visited India in 1879, and preached the ideals of theosophy. Later, in 1883, they established the headquarters at Adayar, Madras, for the international movement of theosophy. Theosophy consists of the truths of all religions. They are as follows:

1. To make the people belong to a single society, free from the discriminations of castes and religions.
2. To find a unity in all Religions, Philosophies and Sciences, after comparing them.
3. To investigate man's latent powers and the puzzling laws of nature.

The three principles of the Theosophical Society are similar to those of the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path, founded by Saint Ramalinga. The Theosophical Society endeavours to find a unity among all human souls, by deeming them as one, on the basis of equality. The "six faceted" Order of the Universal, Pure, and Righteous Path goes a step further, and attempts to seek Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood, by showing kindness to all living beings.

Ramalinga also is a Saint!

The great Tamil scholar Thiru Vi. Kalyanasundaram states thus in his *Autobiography*.

"What is called in the beginning as the *Theosophical Society*, shall be corrected as the *Order of the Righteous Path*, as Theosophy and the Universal and Righteous Path are one and the same." This is true as far as the ideals go. But, whatever be the objectives of the founders of the Theosophical Society, it is not an organization today that works for the eradication of poverty. Even though it did not like communal and religious discriminations, it had not come forward to fight against them. It continues to be a venue for the intercourse among the high-society people.

It was only after a year of Vallalar's death that the Theosophi-

cal Society was born in New York. Madam Blavatsky, as a result of the similarities between the Order of the Universal, Pure and Righteous Path and the Theosophical society, attempted to understand the mind of Vallalar. After becoming aware to some extent, she wrote as follows in her *Confidential Notes on Theosophy*:

"Beyond doubt, Ramalinga is a Saint. This great soul has lived to do a rare service solely for (the establishment of) a world brotherhood and the endeavour to raise human society, to a divine condition, with boundless love."

Madam Blavatsky's reference to our Saint that "he endeavoured to raise human society to a divine condition," is an unadulterated truth.

XXII

GARLANDS OF PRAISE

Devotee of Lord Muruga

Saint Dhandapani, the author of *Pulavarpuranam* lived during the time of Vallalar and moved with him closely. This great man was born in a Saivite Vellala family in Tirunelveli. Even at the age of nine he was devoted to Lord Muruga, and began composing divine songs on Him. Apart from *Pulavarpuranam*, he wrote musically facile verses, many in number, on Saint Arunagirinathar in the Saint's own manner. It was also said that his strength of devotion enabled him see the vision of Lord Muruga. Saint Dhandapani had sung that God had told him that Vallalar would return after his disappearance. Here are a few lines from his "Hymn to Experience."

"The famed Lord who gave
Half of Himself to His Consort,
Told me who loiter
In the corridors of people without compassion,
That the bard of Vadaloor
Would rise and come out from the dark room,
To reform the earthly world.
The Saint of Vadaloor who disappeared into the room
Would appear again,

To attain the bliss of heavens,
So told the Lord.

The Saint of cool-breezed Vadaloor
Would come out from the room,
To cherish the fruit of mellifluous Tamil verses.
So told the Lord.

The Saint of Vadaloor who went into the room
To the knowledge of all the world,
Would come out, shaming the insolent.
So told the Lord.

The Saint of beautiful Vadaloor
Would appear before those who declared
That he would never come out.
So told the Lord.

The renowned bard of rich Tamil of Vadaloor
Would come again,
To put an end to the reproaches of the wicked.
So told the Lord.

The Saint of Vadalur who received the divine grace
But earned the reproaches of humans
Would come to be worshipped by rulers whose shoulders hanker for battle.

So told the Lord."

Also, Saint Dhandapani, in his "Hymn of Questions," seems to ask God "Why He had not been pleased yet to let Vallalar come out of his room." Here are a few lines which are so full of the chaste beauty of Tamil.

"Oh, Shiva! Thou who granted innumerable boons,
Even to demons in the fore!
Art Thou delighted to see

The evil-hearted prosper?

If what Thou told me while in
Sylvan Villipakkam, surrounded by trees, is true
Why hast not Thou still made
The Saint of Vadaloor, the embodiment of compassion, to rise?

Why hast not Thou still made
The Saint of Vadaloor, who melts at heart
And sheds tears even if a tiny insect,
Is seared by the flame of a lamp, to rise?"

Somasundara Naicker

Somasundara Naicker was the teacher of N. Kathirvel Pillai, the leader of the opponents of *Arutpa*. Here is his song of praise on Saint Ramalinga:

"Let us live cherishing
the feet of Saint Ramalinga
Who was born in this world as a result
of the goodness of heart of great sages,
Who was born to free me from
the desires of my heart, full of illusions,
He whose beautiful pair of eyes
were full of compassion,
The divine, the renowned
and the knowing one of Chidambaram."

Chidambaraswamy

The Thirugnanasambanda Monastery in Madurai was an ancient one. Traditionally, its Heads dropped their names and were known by the name of Thirugnanasambanda. As such, in a famous monastery, during the time of Vallalar, there was a great saint by the name of Chidambaraswamy. We know he supported the adherents to *Arutpa*. Here is a spontaneous ode by him on our Saint:

"To reach heights, ye pupils,
Worship the way of the verses of grace of our cherished Saint Ramalinga,
He who fosters divinity in the hearts of humans,
Just as he caused the lamp to glow with water."

Shree Narayana Guru

Shree Narayana Guru was a Keralite social reformer. He worked for and succeeded in seeking the rights of the Eezha community which was suppressed in all ways and subjected to the tyrannies of the high castes. He was another saint like Vallalar. He came to Tamil Nadu, 50 years ago, learnt Tamil, and recited and understood Vallalar's *Songs of Divine Grace*. Thiruvotriyoor Balasundara Swamigal, disciple of Pamban Kumaraguru Swamigal, declared that Shree Narayana Guru had said that *The Songs of Divine Grace* were composed by Saint Ramalinga in a divine state."

(B.K. Pillai, V. 8. *Pavirain*)

The Praises of Mahavidhwan Meenakshisundaram Pillai

Great scholars like Mahavidhwan Meenakshisundaram Pillai of Vallalar's period, who was then known as "the Kambar of the times", and Mayuram Vedhanayagam Pillai who gave the call for the use of Tamil in anything and everywhere in Tamil Nadu, had met Vallalar and praised in amazement his divine attainments. Even during the time of Vallalar, barring a few, the whole of Tamil Nadu had supported him. There is not even a little doubt in this. However, he was disappointed at heart that the people of Tamil Nadu,particularly those close to him in the Order of the Universal Pure and Righteous Path, did not follow the moral codes he had stressed upon. That was why the Saint had declared, "I spread my wears, but none would buy them, so I shall pack up."

After Vallalar's disappearance with his physical body, even his adversaries became his disciples, particularly during the period between 1897 and 1907, when the opposition to *Arutpa* died down. Even orthodox Saivites began reciting the *Songs of Divine Grace*, and those who were unwilling stood aloof without showing opposition.

Kribhanandha Variar

The devotees of Vallalar desired torenovate in a grand manner the Hall of Truth and Wisdom. The foremost among them was Thirumuruga Kribanandha Variar. In the tradition of the great Chera, Chola and Pandiya kings of Tamil Land of yore, Thiru Variar, continues to carry on, as their heir, the sacred tasks of temple upkeep, done by them. Thus, he was engaged for nine years in the renovation of (Satya Gnanasabai) (the Hall of Truth and Wisdom,) and conducted its consecration, on the 24th of April, 1950. He collected as donation for this purpose, a sum of Rs. 3,62,351. The special feature was that the Saivite monasteries also generously donated for the renovation of the Hall of Truth and Wisdom.

On behalf of the Dharmapuram Monastery, the principal head, His Holiness, Subramania Gnanasambandar gave away ten thousand rupees.

On behalf of the Thiruvavaduthurai Monastery, its Head, His Holiness Ambalavana Paramacharia, contributed six thousand rupees.

On behalf of the Thirupanandal Monastery of Banares, His Holiness Arunandhithambiran, donated four thousand rupees. There can not be a greater testimony than this for the triumph of the *Songs of Divine Grace*!

Was this all? The Saivite monasteries in Tamil Nadu had come forward to follow in principle, the universal ideals of Vallalar! The orthodox Saivites of Vallalar's days chided him because he praised in song Lord Rama. Here is an instance from page 7 and 8 of the *Counter to the False Arutpa* published by Nalloor Arumuga Navalar:

"Ramalingam Pillai who composed songs of praise on "mortal Gods" could never be Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace. In order to be respected by the Vaishnavites, he composed songs of praise on Lord Rama and Goddess Lakshmi and Goddess Saraswathy. We cannot agree that he is Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace, and his songs are those of Divine Grace."

Thus, the self same Thiruvavaduthurai Monastery which (once) oppsoed the Saint's ideals of Saivite - Vaishnavite unity is seen now

conducting every year the joint conference on the devotional songs of *Thirupavai* and *Thiruvempavai*, which belong to Saivaite and Vaishnavite religions respectively.

The Dharumapuram Monastery, another Saivite establishment, also conducts an annual conference on *Thirupavai* and *Thiruvempavai* which stand for harmony between Saivism and Vaishnavism.

Shree Sankaracharya, the religious Head of the Seat of Kanchee Kamakoti, also exhorted that a conference on *Thirupavai* and *Thiruvempavai* be conducted, with a view to wishing for a Saivite-Vaishnavite unity. With this in view, the Saivite monasteries conduct these conferences. Whatever be the reason, the end is the result of what Vallalar preached!

XXIII

THE DISAPPEARANCE, A FACT ?

We noted earlier that Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar, Saint Ramalinga's principal pupil had himself declared that he had disappeared with his body. We shall inspect this again:

"After affectionately blessing his disciples, he rested himself on a bed in the hut he stayed in. As per his command, the doors were locked. A year later, when officers of the Government opened the doors and inspected the room, it was empty!

Though he declared when he disappeared, that he would come again, he did not specify the time and the occasion for his reappearance.

Until that time, he announced that he would serve not only in India, but also in countries like Europe and America for world's progress.

This had also been announced to thousands of people."

Accordingly, the Saint disappeared with his body. Even now he lives in this world. He would come again. Thus Thozhuvoor Mudaliar himself trusts and states.

Those Born must Certainly Die!

It is the law of the world that "all those born must certainly die." Accordingly, iunumerable saints gave up their ghost. This we know from history. Bharati reminded us of this in these verses:

"Ye see that the enlightened Buddha died of disease,
The Brahmin saints Sankaracharya and Ramanuja too died.
Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross.
An evil arrow ended Krishna's life,
Even the renowned Rama was drowned to death."

Contrary to this law, if it is said that "Vallalar had disappeared with his body", it is not easy to believe it. It can not also be flatly refuted. Atheists may refute it. As they refuse to believe in the very existence of God, it is natural that they refuse to believe the miracles performed by these who have attained the final felicity, as a result of divine grace. But with respect to theists, the condition is different.

The Rational Stance!

Saint Ramalinga was a mystic indeed. Mere rationaliy is not enough to understand the truth of his end.

"Rationality can not solve everything. We should become aware that a few things are beyond rationality and be devoted to them. The faith of devotion does not repudiate rationality. It goes beyond that. This belief constitutes the sixth of the five senses. Only this sixth sense will be useful in matters which are beyond rationality."

(*Raghupathy Raghav*)

Thus Gandhiji said, and it is very appropriate to the matter we have taken up for examination here. Let us leave out those who can not go beyond the bounds of rationalism, because it is pointless discussing this matter with them.

The Belief of the Saivites!

Neither Hinduism nor Saivism denies the law of the world that "all those who are born should die." But they do furnish us with the history of some true Saivite saints who had a glorious life without death, contrary to this law. Every rule has an exception. Similarly, Saivism demonstrates that there is an exception even to the natural law that "all those who are born should die." This exception, had become a historical event even before the birth of Vallalar.

Anima—reducing the physical body to the size of an atom is one of the Eight miraculous Powers. Those seers who have achieved this power are capable of migrating from one body to another. It is said that the author of the scriptural work, *Thirumanthiram* was proficient in performing these eight miraculous deeds. It is said that he migrated from one body to another, through the help of *anima*.

We had already known that Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace was capable of performing all the eight miraculous deeds.

So we should consider him as one who belonged to the class of seers (who performed miracles), and accordingly examine his disappe-arance. The divine saint Thayumanava sings as follows about the powers of this class of seers:

"You could travel as fast as the mind,
And touch the antepodes and return,
You could extend yourselves to infinite length,
Like the fierce Lord Vishnu with his wheel,
You could hold the seven seers in your palm and drink them,
You could play with Indra's realm and his elephant as with a bull,
You could enclose the whole world into a mustard,
And show in it the eight sacred mountains,
You who could perform yet greater miracles,
Could you not appear before this slave?
Oh, band of wise-seers who have attained
The desirable state of unity between Vedanta and Siddhanta!

If we study the meaning of all the ten songs written by Saint Thayumanava, we will not be made bold to refute Saint Ramalinga's disappearance.

Saint Gnanasambanda

Periyapuranam tells us that Saint Gnanasambanda, considered the foremost of the four religious preceptors, became one with the

effulgent radiance of God. It also says that apart from his becoming one with the radiance, he made all the others who came to witness his wedding to become one with the Light. Of this, the *Tamil Encyclopaedia* states as follows:

"Gnanasambanda got married at Nalloorperumanam, a religious centre. He sang an ode on Nalloorperumanam, and entreated God to "take him". An effulgent light appeared at that time in the temple. He sang a devotional song on Siva, exhorted all those who had gathered there for the wedding to become one with the radiant light, and he and his wife also entered it."

It is appropriate to remember at this juncture that Saint Ramalinga held only Saint Gnanasambanda as his mentor.

Manickavasaka

The Saivites believe that Saint Manickavasaka, who gave *Thiruvasakam*, also vanished into the Divine, with his body. Here is an explanation about this miraculous occurrence:

"The Saint of Vadhavoor, came to Chidambaram and rested at a hermitage, after offering worship at many a religious centre.

Lord Siva Himself came in the garb of a Brahmin, approached the Saint and took down in His own hand the songs of *Thiruvasakam* and *Thirukovaiyar*, as the Saint recited them. Inscribing the works thus, "Written down by the One of Beautiful Chidambaram, as recited by Manickavasaka," he placed the works before the Saint. Amazed by the works, the Brahmins requested the Saint of Vadhavoor to give them an exposition. He came to the temple of Chidambaram and pointed to the Cosmic Dancer and said that "He was the meaning for these songs of praise in Tamil." So saying he quickly entered the Hall and vanished, at the age of thirty two."

(*The Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 8, p. 217.)

We should bear in mind that it was only the *Thiruvasakam* of Saint Manickavasaka who attained *Mukti* with his body, which transmuted Ramalinga into Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace.

Saint Thirunavukkarasu

It is said that Saint Thirunavukkarasu, reached the sacred seat

of *Thirupugaloor*, and bodily became one with the Sivalinga in that temple. We know of this from a song of Sekkizhar in the *Periya-puranam*.

There is also an account of Saint Sundaramoorthy also going to Heaven with his corporeal frame.

"Saint Sundaramoorthy went to the mountain-land, and was happy to meet King Seraman. He sang at Thiruvanjaikkalam a song renouncing domestic life. Mounting a white elephant, at the age of eighteen, he reached Heaven in the month of *Aadi*."

(*The Encyclopaedia, Vol.* 5. p.60.)

The Liberation that Saint Nandha Attained!

Apart from religious, preceptors a few Saivite devotees also vanished with their bodies as indicated by mythologies. The history of Saint Nandha is well known in the country. Here is an account about his final liberation:

"One day he made bold to reach Chidambaram. Greatly worried that his mean existence stood as a bar to his eager interest in worshipping at the temple, he slept off the night there. The Lord of Chidambaram was pleased to appear before him in a dream and say: "Tomorrow morning you have a bath in the fire to remove you from this mean existence, and come to me as a Brahmin." He was pleased to tell the same to the three thousand Brahmins of Chidambaram.

"The next day the Brahmins prepared a fire, approached Saint Nandha and told him of what the Lord was pleased to say. Saint Nandha passed through fire, purified himself as a Brahmin, fit to be worshipped by the three thousand Brahmins of Chidambaram, and entered the temple and reached the feet of Lord Shiva."

(*The Encyclopaedia Vol.* 6, p.5.)

Thus, the mythologies say that Saivite saints like Gnanasambandha, Manickavasaka, Thirunavukkarasu, Sundaramoorthy, and Nandha bodily vanished to become one with God. Both Saivite followers and the orthodox believe these accounts. Those who deny these would not be deemed Saivites and orthodoxical.

A few among those researchers who have received doctoral degrees, stress upon these accounts as historical events, citing proper authority.

Seers who Live after Death

The Hindus have been believing firmly and for long that it is possible to attain a glorious life without death. This may not be proved by scientific knowledge, but none can deny that in spiritual awareness, there is a dimension of this kind. In the world of knowledge, there are many who believe that there are seers, who, conquering death, live somewhere on mountains and in caves.

There are differences of approach to scientific and spiritual knowledge. The scientist, using the five senses and augumenting their ability with the help of scientific equipments, endeavours to understand universal truths. The position of the seekers of spiritual truths is entirely different. The true sage, disciplining his five senses, endeavours to become aware of not only universal truths, but also the very creative spirit of the Universe. The scientist sees everything with his reason. The seer sees everything with divine knowledge. To put it briefly, the true sage sees what the scientist can not see. Yes. He is able to go beyond the bounds of reason. We can not believe that the scientist has the ability to sit in judgment over the attainments of the seer. Therefore, let us not draw science into this!

The Statement of Thiru Vi. Ka!

"First of all let us examine whether man can live a glorious life without death."

"One of the truths which I have understood in my enquiry is that there is a state of immortality. I have no doubt, uncertainty or confusion whatsoever about this. I have a firm belief in that state. That great state about which the elders of our land emphasised so single-heartedly, is now confirmed by many scholars abroad. The findings of great scholars like Sir Oliver Lodge have dislodged all my doubts, uncertainties and confusions. About the state of immortality, I have no doubts whatsoever at present."

"There is a great state known as the immortal state. Without doubting it, rise to actively work towards attaining it." So says Thiru

V. Kalyanasundaram.

(*The Mind of Saint Ramalinga*, p. 102.)

Saint Thayumanava's Thought

Saint Thayumanava, the forerunner of Saint Ramalinga, had confirmed that "man could conquer death and live invisibly", by the "ability to exist in stillness, by controlling thought", in this song:

We can wander in this world unseen by others,
We can even command celestial beings,
We can remain young forever,
We can even enter another body.

None can doubt that Saint Ramalinga had the ability to control thought and exist in stillness.

Saint Kumaragurudasa's Song

Saint Kumaragurudasa was a sage who lived during the time of Saint Ramalinga. He divides the end of the lives of Saivite saints into three categories, in a song. Citing lives of such saints as Enaathina-ather, Meiporulnayanar and Perumizhalaikurumbanayanar, he shows that the soul releases itself from the corporeal frame, and the consequences of human deeds, in order to become one with the Divine.

He cites Saint Sundaramoorthy to show that there was a condition in which man bodily could become one with the Divine.

He cites Saint Thirugnanasambanda to prove that there was a condition in which one could bodily become one with the Effulgent Light.

He mentions Saint Thirunavukkarasu for the body becoming one with the *Sivalinga*.

He cites Saint Nandha for the union with Shiva.

The Saint of Vadhavoor, Manickavasaka, is cited for the body becoming one with the Universal Spirit.

Thus, Saint Kumaragurudasa describes the various states of attaining immortality. He discreetly brings out his desire that he should

attain the state of the glorious life without death, without the pangs of uncertainties about it.

That the world of Saivism also had accepted that there is a glorious life without death, is confirmed by this.

Denial Reflects a Childish Mentality

Even some theists say that the disappearance of such saints as Gnanasambanda with his body is imaginary and that it is not possible. Similarly, they also refuse to believe the disappearance of Saint Ramalinga. I am satisfied with such impartial intellectual reasoning. But those who speak like this, have, like me, only ordinary powers of reasoning. My humble opinion is that those with ordinary powers of thinking have no right to sit in judgment over the miracles performed by seers. Our ordinary awareness is not enough; certainly not enough to look into and to come to conclusions about the divine attainments of seers like Vallalar. It is natural to hesitate to easily accept that "Vallalar had vanished," but to come to bold conclusions that there is no technique for such disappearance, and that none among those who have received divine grace could bodily disappear, reflects a childish mentality.

A Controversy

Some orthodox Saivites declared that it "was true that for saints like Gnanasambandha, the physical body itself became a body of divine light, and that philosophic works also had accepted it, but that Saint Ramalinga could not have reached that state." This argument could not bring credit either to Saivism or to God. If the principle that the physical body could become a body of divine light, is true, and if Saint Gnanasambandha and the like had performed such miracles before, why then was it not possible for Saint Ramalinga of later times?

Had God himself renounced the very grace of granting the glorious life without death to Saivite seers? Or had Saivism itself lost the capacity to bring about those seers who had the powers, by virtue of their penance, to convert the physical body into one of divine light?

We see man's abiltiy in the realm of science growing to the amazement of the world. The space travel of the Russian woman and

man is itself an excellent testimony. When this is the state of the scientific world, only in the realm of spiritual knowledge there is an unacknowledged declaration that the ability of Saivite seers had disappeared from the time of Saint Gnanasambandha; this certainly is no credit to Saivism or to God.

The Collector's Investigation

Within a year of Vallalar's disappearance, the then English Collector of the South Arcot District had gone to Siddhivalagam and investigated the Saint's disappearance. The English doctor who went with him also had examined the surroundings of the room where the Saint went into a final trance. The Government sent an English doctor also with a view to finding out the truth through an enquiry according to medical science. It is not known that both these had approved of the Saint's disappearance without any doubts. They could not have also done so, because even they are those who could not have gone beyond the bounds of reason. However, both the Collector and the doctor had not left any notes, rebutting the news of the Saint's disappearance. I was not able to get the authoritative communique sent to the Government by the two English men. All the efforts I had taken these past few months to get it did not bear fruit. A brief note by the English Collector, in the South Arcot Gazette, under the title *Parvathipuram*, on Saint Ramalinga, is found. Vallalar had been praised in it. It is evident that the English Collector had a great deal of respect for Vallalar.

The Englishman Praises

We saw earlier the Collector's note in the South Arcot District Gazette. Let us have a look at the section dealing with the disappearance of Vallarlar, again:

"In 1874. he went into a room in Mettukkuppam (a small hamlet adjacent to Karunguzhi), and had it latched from outside. (Even now the room is like that.) It was his habit to use the room for deep meditation. He commanded his disciples not to open the room for some days. From then on he disappeared. The room still remains locked. Those devoted to him still believe that he had become one with God. They also believe that when the appropriate time comes, he will return.

Whatever may be thought of him as a religious leader, as far as his verses are concerned, they are of a high quality. This has been admitted by competent elders. His story is an indication of the directions which religious fervour may still take."

The English Collector's note seems to accept the truth of Vallalar's disappearance in a paradoxical manner.

The Tamil Encyclopaedia, under the name of *Abidhana Chinthamani*, published 30 years ago, confirms the news of Vallalar's disappearance, with the following statement:

"While meditating on Lord Shiva, at the abode of Siddhivalagam in Mettukkuppam, near Vadaloor, he had a glimpse of the Supreme Light Divine as a result of his spiritual fruition. He remained still in a state of trance, met his Divine Mentor, and his corporeal body became one with the body of nature. He then indicated to his followers to close the door. He also closed the door of consciousness and in the still silence attained final bliss."

The *Tamil Encyclopaedia*, published by the Tamil Development Council, under the aegis of the Government, confirms the disappearance of Vallalar of the Light of Divine Grace in a statement in Vol. 6, p. 33, as follows:

" Vallalar praises Manickavasaka thus:
'Oh! Lord of Beautiful Vadhavoor!
After attaining a Body of Pure Love,
You became a Body of Grace,
And then a Body of Bliss.'
This is also happily applicable to Vallalar."

Tamil scholar, Thiru Vi. Kalyanasundaram, the foremost of the forward looking thinkers among the theists, has this to say, to confirm the disappearance of the Sage of Vadaloor:

"Deeming Saint Thirugnanasambandha as his mentor, and the *Thiruvasakam* as the source-book, worshipping Lord Muruga, having glimpses of the gracious form of God, renouncing the aberrations of lust and anger, becoming aware of the perfect suffusion of God everywehre, fostering the compassionate morality of not harming any

living beings, getting clarified that moral code alone is the universal and righteous path, and inculcating that path to the world, Saint Ramalinga attained the state of the glorious life without death."

(*The Mind of Saint Ramalinga*, p. 141).

The Declaration by Vallalar himself

These external evidences apart, the internal evidence in the *Arutpa* also compels us to believe that Vallalar had vanished with his body. The following song from *Thiruarutpa*, (*Songs of Divine Grace*), tells us that Vallalar had a divine and immortal body:

"I prayed the Lord to give me an immortal body
Which can not be destroyed by air, earth and sky,
Fire, water and the rays of the sun,
By death, disease and murderous weapons,
By planets and their evil influences,
By anything at any time.
And he hastened to grant it to me."

As this is a song sung by Vallalar himself, people who have faith in his veracity have to trust the meaning of this song.

That which is deemed "the glorious life without death" is also referred to as "the infinitely blissful sleep" by elders. Vallalar also sang thus:

"Ignorant that I was, I babbled, praised by the mad world,
Thou wert pleased to grant all my desires.
I am relieved of my fears and I drink the nectar of grace.
Oh, I experience the Sleep of Bliss everyday!"

And afterwards entered the room and latched himself in. By this also, we have to believe that the Saint bad disappeared. Even the orthodox Saivites who had differences of opinion with Saint Ramalinga had not denied that he was the most virtuous minded who had never uttered falsehood. None could say that he who lived as a white-robed ascetic throughout his life sought popularity with the people by telling them something that was contrary to truth. Even if his life had ended in

any other way, his glory could not have been blemished. When this was the truth, did he need to lie by stating that he had attained the glorious life without death?

In matters concerning divine beings like Vallalar, there is no place for suicide. To connect suicide with that great person is a sin by itself.

If He had Not Disappeared...

Jesus Christ was crucified by some fanatics. Gandhiji fell a prey to the bullets of religious fanatic. Was their fame blemished because they were killed? No! Owing to the sacrifice of their lives for a cause, the two men are worshipped by people as Gods.

Ramakrishna Paramahamsa died a natural death. Is his fame diminished because of that? His fame radiates throughout the world.

Even if our Vallalar were to have been killed like Christ or Gandhiji, or had died a natural death like Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, his fame would have not diminished. It is certain that he would have attained everlasting fame through the *Songs of Divine Grace* he had composed. But it is the firm belief of the world of theism that Vallalar had disappeared by transmuting his fleshly body into one of divine light. We may doubt this, but we do not have enough evidence to repudiate this. The reason for the doubt is that we are unable to go beyond the bounds of reason.

It is because Vallalar himself declared that he had transmuted his fleshly body into one of divine light, that I am afraid to doubt the account of his disappearance. The sage of Vadaloor was one who was so great as to be true to his heart. As his heart was so true that his words also radiate truth. As far as I am concerned, I believe that Vallalar attained the glorious life without death, because he was so devoted to God and his words were so true.

If we distrust the words of Saints like Vallalar, then our life itself would become meaningless.

The Mind of the Saint!

Though Saint Ramalinga prayed to God for the gift of a life

in which the fleshly body becomes one of divine light, he also said lkie other Saivite seers, that "he was willing to give up the fleshly body in order to become one with divine grace." This is known from his song in the *Arutpa*:

"This is the auspicious moment for Thee to give,
Bless me with the Unique and Supreme Light Divine.
This is one way to redeem me.
Otherwise gladly take away my body and life.
I agree to either way.
Thy holy feet are the witness to what I say.
Thy heart alone knoweth mine.
My Mother, my Father, my Master and my Lord!
Formless and in Form Thou reside within me."

It is evident from this that the Saint was in no state of mind to concoct that he had attained the glorious life without death. Indeed, even if he had attained the state of beatitude after death, he would have doubtless revealed it to the whole world.

The time of Saint Gnanasambandha was many centuries before the present. His life had ended even during the reign of the Saivite king who had worshipped this saint as his mentor. The account of his disappearance, we know only from mythologies which were full of stories. He did not sing that he had received the divine power to transmute the fleshy body into one of divine light.

The situation of Saint Ramalinga is different. He lived and died in the reign of the British of an alien religion. Velayudha Mudaliar declares that he took leave of his disciples, entered the room at Siddhivalagam and disappeared, as many thousands had known. Saint Thandapani, another Saivite seer of Vallalar's time, had also left many songs, believing in the miracle of the Saint's disappearance. Thus, those who believed in the disappearance of Saint Gnanasambandha into the divine light, as described by mythologies, can not disbelieve that Saint Ramalinga, the hero of modern history became one with the Light Divine.

The Camphor-Story!

There is also a traditional account about the Saint's disappearance. It is said that he bought a large amount of camphor and gathered it at Siddhivalagam, and sat on it in a deep trance on the final day and had his body absorbed by camphor. There is no written proof for this. There is also no reference to the use of this method by any Saivite saint who living before Saint Ramalinga's time for attaining the final bliss. His *Arutpa* also does not have evidence for confirming this account. He mentions in a few places in the *Thiruarutpa* that the beautiful body of God radiated the fragrance of camphor. He had not declared anywhere that there was an art known for absorbing the body with the aid of camphor or that he had attained it. This "Camphor-Story" is not found in Velayudha Mudaliar's account of the final day, or in the note on the Saint in the South Arcot District Gazette. Therefore, there is not the slightest credibility in this story.

Generally speaking, let those who have no belief in the glorious life without death, also examine it, without rejecting it! It is better not to destroy the belief that man could conquer death. Where is the joy in destroying this belief, in favour of turning in the grave?

There is no doubt that Vallalar's fame rests also on his transmuting his fleshly body into one of divine light. But we worship him not for that alone. We worship him also as a man of character, a noble sage, a generous hearted person who appeased other people's hunger, a man of mercy who was compassionate to living beings, and as a composer who gushed forth with spontaneous verses. Therefore, even those who do not believe in his disappearance, should worship him as the supreme gem of mankind. They should also adulate him in this manner. May this belief last forever!

A Land Without Traitors

"Gandhiji was killed by Godse, a Brahmin. The end of Vallalar also was similar to this." So goes a rumour.

A few communities, foremost in Tamil society might have failed to break new grounds amidst tradition, accepting the leadership of Vallalar in religion; it is a fact they failed. The more important among them might have opposed Vallalar's revolutionary ideas because

of their own orthodox feelings; it is known they did so. But it can be firmly believed that they could not have turned themselves into traitors (like Godse) to the extent of putting an end to Vallalar's life.

Those who have an unshakable faith in the culture of Tamils would accept my view, and not oppose it. No traitors (Godses) were born in the history of Tamil Nadu even during Vallalar's time, who would want to kill saints, nor would they be born in the future. This is the special glory of the Tamils.

The Sacred Body that Could Not be Touched!

This besides, none could have touched Vallalar's body with murderous intentions, for he had attained a "Body of Grace".

> "I prayed the Lord to give me an immortal body,
> Which can not be destroyed by air, earth, sky and fire,
> Water, and the rays of the sun,
> Or by death, disease, and murderous weapons,
> Or by planets and their evil influences,
> Or by anything at any time,
> And He hastened to grant it to me."

He says in this song, that he had attained by divine grace a body that could not be destroyed even by weapons of murder. So, this song is an excellent internal proof to show that a treachery of the Godse-kind could not have occurred in his case. Let those who have faith in the veracity of Vallalar, believe, with the help of this song, that such a treachery did not take place in his case!

XXIV

WOULD VALLALAR COME ?

Thozhuvoor Velayutha Mudaliar had remarked: "When Saint Ramalinga vanished, he said he would come again. But he did not indicate anything about the time of coming and the occasion." The wisemen of his time, like Saint Thandapani, also believed that he would come again.

Those who would not believe that Vallalar disappeared with his fleshly body, would not also believe that he would come again. Generally, it is not easy for all to believe that Vallalar would come again to us. But, after his transmutation of the fleshly body, which his parents had endowed him with, into one of divine light, during his disappearance, it was a fact that there was the advent of someone in the North of India as an heir to him.

He could have Gone to the North!

Vallalar considered the entire universe which was created by the Supreme Spirit as his home. Therefore we could believe that he went in another direction "to spread his wares" which he "could not sell" in Tamil Nadu where he tried to "set up shop." Yes! We may believe that he tried to sell the ware called "Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood", by setting up shop at the southern end of India; as the ware could not be sold, he wound up shop here, and went to the North to continue his "business".

"Even though Hindus would not pay heed to my sermons, great souls, carefully preserving the secret thoughts imbedded in scriptures and canons, would reveal them to those of foreign lands. They would gladly receive them."

"Far away in the North, the public spirited brothers, would perform many miracles in India and you would see soon their contributing to the immense good in our land."

"The great truths that I give you free now, you would then understand and respect and act accordingly." Thus had said Vallalar, according to the information given by Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar.

As per the utterance of Vallalar, after his disappearance, a great soul became familiar to us in the North. And that was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

"Far away in the North" of Vallalar need not be held as "North of the Himalayas". It may be interpreted as "North of the Tirupati Hills". As neither quick means of transport like the railway train, motor car and the aeroplane, nor means of communication like the posts and telegraphs were prevalent during his time, the India, north of Tirupati, might have appeared far away to him.

Similarity Even in Their Departure

At the time when Vallalar disappeared, Gandhiji was a five year old child.

Vallalar was born on the 5th of October 1823. Gandhiji was born in Porbandhar in the North, on the 2nd of October, 1869.

With regard to the departure of these great men also we see an amazing similarity. Vallarar departed on Friday the 30th of January 1874.

Gandhiji departed on Friday the 30th of January 1948.

Though Saint Ramalinga cared for the establishment of a good Government in the land, he devoted greater attention to spiritual affairs. Gandhiji also cared for spiritual matters, but he devoted greater attention to political affairs.

Agreement in Ideals

Such differences without contradiction was due to the different melieu prevailing in the country during the time these two great men lived. Declaring that "the cruel rule should quickly end," Vallalar sang "Let those seekers of righteous path, suffused with divine grace, rule". Gandhiji described the same as *Ramrajya.* This apart, we do see such similarities of ideas in many areas between them as to make us doubt whether Vallalar himself had incarnated himself as Gandhiji.

Vallalar endeavoured to spread such great ideals as these among the people of Tamil Nadu, through his songs:

> "Caste Discrimination should be totally eradicated."
>
> "All religions should go, and a society, free from religions should be established."
>
> "We should consider all living beings as equal, and show compassion to them."
>
> "Hunger should be put an end to, and all the people of the world should have enough to eat."

All these ideals were emphasised by Gandhiji also. Only in one particular did Gandhiji differ a little from Vallalar. That is, Vallalar desired to see a society that was free from religions. Gandhiji wished to see a unity among religions, without destroying them. We need not consider this a great contradiction.

If, on the basis of harmony and mutual good will, it is possible, to establish a unity among all religions, it may be held that it would have been agreeable to Vallalar's mind.

Similarly, if religions could not be redeemed from their deterioration, then destroying them completely would be agreeable to Gandhiism.

Vallalar spread new and revolutionary ideas among the people. Beyond this, he had no opportunity to involve himself in action to seek success for his principles. The main reason for this was that he was also endeavouring to seek a glorious life without death for his soul.

The Success of Gandhiji

As Gandhiji was totally involved in politics, he was able to create revolutionary changes in society. In India today, a secular Government rules; untouchability has been eradicated by law; in right to property and in other social rights, the law of equality of the sexes has been established. The Constitution assures that a "socialistic society" will be established to remove the distinctions of the rich and the poor. The superstition of making animal sacrifices in the name of God has been made illegal. Legal procedures have been initiated to put an end to the evil habit of drinking. A policy of non-alignment is being followed, with a view to preventing world wars, fostering international relationship on a basis of fairness. and to seeing a renaissance in the life of the people, internally. Measures have been taken to foster national integration, and to nurture world unity.

We should bear in mind that these desirable means ,of action apart from being the outcome of Gandhiji's preachings, are also in tune with Saint Ramalinga's philosophy of Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood.

The Radiant Light is Gandhiji Himself!

We may say in brief that Saint Ramalinga who flourished in Tamil Nadu as the *Jothi*, ("the Radiant Light"), appeared in the form of "Gandhi" in the North.

The ideals which were not accepted in the South when Vallalar preached them, were welcomed with great respect and praise by the Tamil people, when Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi of the North preached them. With prior knowledge of this, Saint Ramalinga exhorted he Tamil people:

"The great truths that I give you free now, would be the same which great souls, appearing in the North, would tell you. You would then understand and respect them and act accordingly."

Though Saint Ramalinga disliked all religions, he did not eschew the virtues emphasised by those religions. Yes. He cared for those virtues, but disliked the meaningless observances. To put the same in a different way, he loved the principles, and detested the empty rituals.

"Only when you belong to a nation, could you be an international leader. Similarly, only when you belong to a religion, could you know all religions and creeds and be a universalist."

(*Harijan*, 29.2.48)

This is Gandhiji's view. Thus, he remained all his life a true Hindu, and at the same time, a fair friend of all religions of the world. If this explanation is borne in mind, the similarity of thought in Gandhiji and Vallalar, with respect to religion, can be understood.

The Contribution of Gandhiji

It is essential that the harmony of religious thought in Gandhiji and Vallalar is understood in greater detail.

Gandhiji gave a new life to Hinduism that was being destroyed by the invasion of foreign religions. At a time when the gap between politics and morality was ever widening, he endeavoured to bring about a greater unity than what obtained between the two in the past.

He spoke for the rights and betterment of the lot of the people belonging to the oppressed and depressed backward communities, who were quitting Hindu religion everyday and embracing other religions and he endeavoured to pursuade all the rest to remain within the Hindu fold. At the same time, he attempted to remove religious differences and the resultant animosities, and fostered a unity among all religions.

In spite of this, this great man was shot and killed by Godse, because of the solitary reason that Gandhiji was averse to Hindu religious fanaticism, Godse considered him an enemy and a traitor to Hinduism.

Pure hearted Saivite!

Because Vallalar was born and bred up in Tamil Nadu, there was no Godse for him! However, there were scholars of Saivite scriptures and canons, during his time and later, who considered him even an enemy of and traitor to orthodox Saivism. This we had known earlier.

Saint Ramalinga did not like *that* "Saivism" which hated other religions. But liking Saivism on a philosophic basis, he followed those

codes which it inculcated. Rejecting multiplicity of Gods, he insisted on the principle that "God is one", and worshipped *that* God in the name of "Shiva".

Vallalar believed that the five syllabled "Namasivaya" was the great gospel which granted the glorious life without death. Reciting it daily, he also made his followers and disciples to recite it.

Chidambaram was considered the sacred seat which gave "Final Bliss" to Saivites. Vallalar declared it as the sacred seat at which Lord Shiva appeared before him in a vision. Though, at a later time, he named Vadaloor as "North Chidambaram of Wisdom", he continued to call Old Chidambaram, "Chidambaram of Ancient Wisdom".

He deemed Saint Gnanasambanda, the foremost of Saivite religious preceptors, as his mentor. He considered *Thiruvasakam*, the 8th of the 12 canons, as a devotional work, and the *Thirumanthiram*, the 10th canon and the foremost of Saivite religious scriptures, as a rare treasure that gave him a new life.

Thus, without rejecting Saivism, and living according to the path of Saivism, Vallalar attempted to find a unity among many religious philosophies, and put an end to the differences of established religions. Finding a religionless society was considered by him as the final goal of his pilgrimage. The orthodox Saivites who did not understand him, considered him only as an enemy to Saivism. During his life-time, they gave him endless trouble. Later on also, they carried on a propaganda, ridiculing him. What with eighteen publications in all in this regard by them, what to think of their Saivite religious fanaticism!

Generally, both Gandhiji and Vallalar, who lived as his guide, were harassed by people of their own religion. Fortunately, our solace is, such people were only a few!

XXV

LET US FOLLOW VALLALAR

Just because a few or many men of religion deceive the people it is not fair to reason, to reject either the religious sermons which inculcate discipline, or ridicule the principles of scriptures.

"In due course, any establishment, or method will become instruments to be exploited by a few self-seekers. It is a fact that religions and religious establishments have been spoilt accordingly. But it is not a fair means of enquiry to insult founders of religion on the basis of the deterioration that takes place later. We should not think that the gutter reflects the dirt in the clouds! Just as the clouds and the rains are held in respect, so the ancient sages and their works of truth should be respected and read."

This is the exhortation of Rajaji to reformists, in the preface from his book, *The Path That Kannan Showed*, (*Kannan Kaattia Vazhi*). Though as reformers, both Vallalar and Gandhiji opposed those who duped people in the name of religion, they cherished the normal principles and the philosophies that were preached by saints.

The Two are the Same!

I am one who tries to follow Gandhiji, not only in politics, but also in spiritual matters. According to my experiences in this endeavour, and as I compare Gandhiji to Vallalar, I believe that Saint Ramalinga who was born in and disappeared from the South, appeared (again) as

Karamchand Gandhi in the North. Yes. We should deem Gandhiji of the North who flourished as the leader of the whole of India, only as a representative of Saint Ramalinga who declared while vanishing that "he would come again". This belief may be as a result of my devotion to this great man. As far as I am concerned, this belief has given me a lot of benefits. I pray that all should hold the same belief as mine.

A perspective should be found by a comparison of the preachings and occurrences in the life of Vallalar with those of Gandhiji. Then the truth of what I say can be known.

The Successor in Tamil Nadu!

I should mention here of another seer who also lived in Tamil Nadu as a successor to Vallalar. He is the Great Poet, Subramaniya Bharati. After Ramakrishna, we heard Vivekananda speak in his voice. Similarly, the credit of echoing Vallalar's principles in his own voice, after his life, goes to poet Bharati. But, like Vivekananda, Bharati did not dedicate himself to religious matters. He lived during the time of the national resurgence. Therefore he was caught up in the storm of the "Freedom Struggle." Otherwise, his sole task would have been to serve by spreading the ideals of Vallalar. I have absolutely no doubt about this.

Bharati Speaks

In his book called *Bharati-Essay*, under the title, "The Awakening of Tamil Nadu", Bharati speaks of Vallalar as follows:

"Saint Ramalinga declares that he accepts all religions.

"Tamil Nadu is the proper field for the establishment of the principle of a universal religion, by the rooting out of all religious differences in the world. Saints who are capable of putting an end to all religious antagonisms in the world for the worship of the same God for redemption, are now born in Tamil Nadu. We declared that a new world awakening in this regard would begin in Tamil Nadu.

That Tamil Nadu, not now, but for a long time, has been a leading light, is known to all."

"A grand awakening would come about throughout the world. It is twenty years since India has woken up as a beginning. Tamil Nadu was the first to awake in India."

"Saints like Ramalinga were the architects of this new awakening in Tamil Nadu."

The Prophecy of Bharati

The declaration of Bharati that Saint Ramalinga was the foremost to bring about an awakening in the whole world is a worthwhile thought. This is confirmed by the meaning of the following song from the *Thiruarutpa*:

"God ordained the advent of my birth in this epoch, to reform the people of the world who are wicked inside, but appear to be good from outside, to enable them to achieve the Order of the Righteous Path, and let them rejoice in their attainment of divinity from with in."

Bharati confirms the same by stating that "he was sent by God as the foremost of all the sages to reform the whole world." We may say that there was none before Bharati or after him who had understood so clearly the greatness of Vallalar's birth.

Among the Disciples......

During Saint Ramalinga's time, there were innumerable disciples with him. But none was an heir to his reformistic ideals. Thozhuvoor Velayudha Mudaliar, the principal disciple, had a boundless devotion to Vallalar. But even he could not continue the revolutionary reforms begun by Vallalar. The closure of the Temple of Truth and Knowledge for a few years, and the Order of the Universal and Righteous Path becoming inactive for a number of years, would show that none of Vallalar's disciples had the capacity to succeed him. It is surprising that none despite the existence of many great scholars in Tamil, came forward to write a critical biography of Vallalar. It is ninety years since his disappearance. It is the misfortune of Tamil Nadu that none of the later generation was available to write and present a full-length biography of this divine poet's glorious life.

The Tradition was Gone

We can say that the Movement for Spiritual Love and Unity almost

disappeared with the Saint. After his life, many Orders of Universal and Righteous Path came into being in Tamil Nadu. Discounting those that became defunct, I understand that there were more than thousands in existence. But they did not function as organizations for socio-religious reform, in the manner of Saint Ramalinga, but only as centres for singing religious hymns and for spreading devotional codes.

Many thousands of devotees of the *Arutpa* do go about in the country. It is a bitter truth that none of them is dedicated to the revolution of finding a new society free from the discrimination of castes and creeds. The religiously devoted public do sing Vallalar's divine songs. By singing the divine songs of Vallalar, many famous singers, spread his devotional morality. S.G. Kittappa, the musical genius of the past generation, sang and immortalized his song "Kodaiyile". ("In Summer"); we may say that he was born especially to sing that single song. But many singers sing without feeling that it is a song from the divine *Arutpa* that they are rendering. This is because, the historical tradition of Saint Ramalinga's life which is intertwined with the *Arutpa*, has been given a go-by.

Mariappa Swamigal, a genius of music, devoted to Vallalar, endeavoured to spread Vallalar's devotional morality by singing his *Songs of Divine Grace.*

Generally speaking, Vallalar's songs of socio - religious reform have not been as popular among the people as the devotional songs in the *Arutpa*. They lie hidden in the book of *Thiruarutpa* itself. Therefore, pure righteous path seekers who had renounced attachments to creeds and communities had not come into being. Those of the Order of the Righteous Path did not meaningfully cherish the pure and righteous path enunciated by Vallalar. The body and soul did not vibrate to the great gospel of "*Supreme Light Divine*" and "*Supreme Love Divine*". If this was the state of the Order of the Righteous Path, how could there be a successor of Vallalar?

Fortunately, Orders of the Righteous Path are of service in preserving the name of Vallalar and in making the people remember his Divine Songs. They can be praised for this.

Vallalar was a great reformer who could be distinguished from saints like Thayumanava and Arunagiri. It was a special distinction

associated with his birth. Understanding this, Orders of the Righteous Path and devotees of the *Arutpa*, atleast from now on, should follow the path of reform. The time has come for this..

If the task of socio-religious reform had taken place, by following the footsteps of Vallalar, after his death, the communal and atheistic unrest in Tamil Nadu could have been avoided.

The Self-Respect Association

Those who belonged to the Self-Respect Association which lived and died after a few years, long ago, sought a publicity to same extent for the socio-religious ideas of Vallalar. But they were not representatives of Vallalar's faith in God, or his discipline of compassion for living beings, or his philosophic knowledge. They did not also like to be so. To put it briefly, they used Vallalar's songs of reform as a means to foster communal and atheistic feelings. But they did not succeed in that also. In fine, to resuscitate Vallalar's ideals of socio-religious reform, a successor is to be born only hereafter in Tamil Nadu.

The great movement that has come about for national integration in India seems to be a guiding light for Vallalar's "Spiritual Love and Universal Brotherhood". The Tamils, so enlightened, should endeavour to introduce Vallalar to the world. Tamil Nadu which cherishes Gandhiji and Bharati can not ignore Saint Ramalinga. They also *should not* ignore him.

In the Path of Reform ....

Distinctions of caste and religion alone are obstacles to national integration. Except through achieving national integration, on the basis universal love, by the eradication of these discriminations, national integration at the political level is not possible. Bharati first emphasised that "all are of one kind", and "they are all of one community". Only later he sang, "all of us are Indians." He seems to discreetly indicate that unless the feelings of unity that "all are of one kind" are first born and that "all are of one community". among the people of India, the feeling that we are a nationally integrated community of Indians will not come about. He should have inherited this feeling from Vallalar.

We shall Find a Unity!

If fissiperous tendencies are born in the form of politics, among the people of India and Tamil Nadu today, the basic reason for this is the growth of caste and religious feeling of separatism, at the expense of the awareness of social unity. This alone is the prime cause which can be remedied only by an awareness of a social integration of the world. The other name for this is "Spiritual Love and Unity". "Spiritual Love and Unity" should become the motto of the movement for world peace. This alone can be the sacred slogan to save the world from war-mongering.

Though Saint Ramalinga was born in Tamil Nadu and in the Tamil community and sang only in Tamil, he belongs to the whole world. He was an internationalist and a universal lover of all religions, and a seer who came to teach us the glorious life without death!

The thought that the Saint still lives amidst us gives us an immense power. Therefore let us think that Saint Ramalinga suffuses our lives and feelings! When the Saint disappeared, he declared that "he would hereafter enter all bodies." Thus to believe that he had made every one of our bodies an abode for him to live in, is a means for attaining the "Supreme Spirit" in this life itself.

In the belief that there is a "glorious life without death", if we try for it, we will atleast be able to put off death and also derive the great joy of not being born again. Therefore, let us believe in the glorious life without death, and cherish the great Saint who taught that to us.

We Shall Follow Vallalar!

If we engage ourselves in the sacred task of eradicating castes, we will be able to atleast destroy the evil of the high-low caste attitudes, in order to establish an equality of status among all. Therefore, let us pay homage to and cherish in our heart the great Saint who taught (us) the Universal and Righteous Path, with a view to putting an end to castes.

By the utterance, "Religions that teach are all false, indeed. Do not associate yourselves with them", we may atleast see an end to

religious acrimonies and quarrels. Let us therefore praise the Great Poet Ramalinga who composed verses for putting an end to religious discriminations!

If the discipline of showing compassion even to creatures like the flies and ants is stressed upon as the goal of life, then the capacity of showing kindness to human beings who have imbibed in themselves six senses, will grow. Therefore, let us enshrine in our hearts the great soul who taught us the discipline of kindness to all lives!

Let Tamil Nadu, let India, let the whole world gather together to find spiritual love and unity! Let all mankind say "All Hail" to Saint Ramalinga who came to save it! That is the only way for it to flourish!

May the name, *Ramalinga*, be always pronounced as a sacred incantation by every one! This alone is my prayer!

WITH COURAG[illegible]AITH